

**PATHWAYS TO INDEPENDENCE: THE EXPERIENCE OF  
YOUNG HOMELESS PEOPLE**

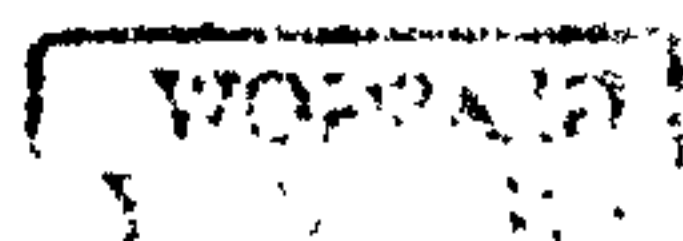
**SUZANNE FITZPATRICK**

**Pathways to Independence: The Experience of Young Homeless People**

**By**  
**Suzanne Fitzpatrick**

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through homelessness. Young people who followed a 'local area' homelessness pathway, particularly those who used official services in their own community, made better progress than those who stayed in the city-wide homeless accommodation network. Young women appeared to move out of homelessness more successfully than young men, and were less likely to be 'hidden' homeless.

Other key research findings were that unemployment and the withdrawal of social security benefits were the most important factors underlying the homelessness of these young people. The majority of young homeless people had a continuing relationship with their parents despite long-term family problems. However, it was the role of parents as a source of support, rather than accommodation, which was crucial in helping them to resolve their homeless situation.

A series of policy and practice recommendations are offered in the thesis. The most significant is that services must be located in different places for distinct groups within the young homeless population. While there is a continuing need for city centre facilities for young people who gravitate there on becoming homeless, these centralised services will not reach a great many young people who are homeless in their local community.



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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>BTHA</b>	<b>Blue Triangle Housing Association</b>
<b>CCI</b>	<b>City Centre Initiative</b>
<b>CHRUS</b>	<b>Centre for Housing Research and Urban Studies</b>
<b>GCSH</b>	<b>Glasgow Council for Single Homeless</b>
<b>GHS</b>	<b>General Household Survey</b>
<b>HAC</b>	<b>Hamish Allen Centre</b>
<b>HB</b>	<b>Housing Benefit</b>
<b>HYPT</b>	<b>Homeless Young Persons Team</b>
<b>IS</b>	<b>Income Support</b>
<b>JSA</b>	<b>Job Seekers Allowance</b>
<b>LECS</b>	<b>Local Enterprise Companies</b>
<b>NACRO</b>	<b>National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders</b>
<b>SCSH</b>	<b>Scottish Council for Single Homeless</b>
<b>SHCS</b>	<b>Scottish House Conditions Survey</b>
<b>SPA</b>	<b>Strathclyde Poverty Alliance</b>
<b>TECS</b>	<b>Training and Enterprise Councils</b>
<b>UB</b>	<b>Unemployment Benefit</b>
<b>YT</b>	<b>Youth Training</b>
<b>YTS</b>	<b>Youth Training Scheme</b>
<b>YHS</b>	<b>Youth Housing Strategy</b>

## **PART 1**

### **FORMULATING THE PROBLEM**

## **CHAPTER 1.1: INTRODUCTION**

This research began in 1991 when the surge in youth homelessness was becoming increasingly apparent. ‘Cardboard city’ in London had attracted considerable media attention as one of the most obvious symptoms of the callousness and social irresponsibility of the Thatcher era. However, there was growing recognition amongst researchers that young people sleeping rough in the streets of the capital, and in city centres throughout the country, represented only the most visible manifestation of youth homelessness. Disadvantaged young people living in local communities throughout Britain had borne the brunt of economic and policy upheavals, and anecdotal evidence suggested that many of them had also endured periods of homelessness. It was these broader patterns of youth homelessness which I set out to investigate in this research, with the aim of offering policy recommendations which would help to address the problems faced by young homeless people.

The remainder of Part 1 of the thesis formulates the problem I sought to investigate in this research. Chapter 1.2 traces the dramatic growth in youth homelessness in the past decade, and locates the explanation in a series of social and economic trends which have adversely affected young people in recent years. This chapter highlights the gaps in previous research on youth homelessness which my study sought to fill, and summarises the conceptual framework within which I pursued these research aims. Chapter 1.3 provides an overview of the current response of public and voluntary services to the plight of young homeless people, and introduces a range of specific initiatives which are evaluated later in the thesis. Chapters 1.4 and 1.5 describe the methods and location of the research respectively.

Part 2 of the thesis presents the central research findings on young people’s experiences of homelessness. Chapter 2.1 explores the meaning of home and homelessness to young people in order to form a working definition of homelessness for use in the thesis. Chapter 2.2 presents the framework of ‘homelessness pathways’ developed in the research, and discusses each of the pathways in detail. This chapter is necessarily the longest in the thesis as it



presents my main contribution to knowledge about youth homelessness. Chapter 2.3 summarises young homeless people's progress as revealed by the follow-up study conducted one year after the main stage of fieldwork was completed. Chapter 2.4 focuses on the impact of gender on young people's pathways through homelessness.

The intention in Part 3 of the thesis is to place young people's experiences of homelessness in the context of their lives as a whole. Chapter 3.1 focuses on young homeless people's social networks: their relationship with their family of origin; their friendship networks; and their family formation patterns. This may be termed the 'private' sphere of their lives. Chapter 3.2 explores the more 'public' aspects of young homeless people's lives by examining their experiences of school, work and public services.

Part 4 of the thesis considers solutions to youth homelessness, drawing on evidence from this research and previous studies. Chapter 4.1 examines the needs and housing preferences of young homeless people; Chapter 4.2 summarises the overall findings of the thesis; and Chapter 4.3 presents my policy and practice recommendations.

The fieldwork which produced the data for this thesis was conducted between summer 1993 and winter 1994. I have endeavoured to bring the thesis up to date until 1 May 1997 when the Labour Government was elected. Thus it does not comment upon the policy position of the new Government on these matters, nor on other developments since that date.



## **CHAPTER 1.2: AN INTRODUCTION TO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND THE RESEARCH**

### **Introduction**

This chapter sets the context for the research by providing an overview of youth homelessness. I begin by tracing the dramatic rise in the number of young people becoming homeless over the last decade. An explanation is sought by exploring the 'normal' routes which young people take to independent living, and by examining the housing, economic and social trends which have made this transition increasingly difficult in recent years. My research focus is then explained in the context of previous studies of youth homelessness. The chapter ends by outlining the conceptual framework which was used in the research.

### **The Growth in Youth Homelessness**

A range of sources provide evidence of a sharp escalation in homelessness in the 1980s and early 1990s (Greve, 1991). For example, applications under the homeless persons legislation almost trebled in Scotland from 15,000 in 1983/4 to a peak of 43,000 in 1993/94, before dropping slightly to 40,900 by 1995/6 (Scottish Office, 1997).

Homelessness has expanded most rapidly amongst young, single people, particularly those under 18 (Greve, 1991). Agencies working with young homeless people reported a massive increase in demand for their services from the mid-1980s (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994), and this demand appears to have been sustained in the 1990s. For example, the Stopover hostel in Glasgow could accommodate one in three of the young people who sought shelter there when it opened in 1987; by 1991 the proportion was down to one in seven (Glasgow Council for Single Homeless (GCSH), 1993). A more recent survey of Stopover hostels located throughout Scotland found that four out of every five young people referred to these projects were not admitted, and the majority were refused a place because there were no vacancies (Scottish Council for Single Homeless (SCSH) and Shelter (Scotland), 1994).

Official statistics indicate that young people aged 16 to 25 are disproportionately affected by homelessness: this age group accounts for only 17 per cent of the adult population in the UK but comprises 25 per cent of homeless applicants to local authorities (Inquiry into Preventing Youth Homelessness, 1996). There were 10,400 single homeless applicants under 25 in Scotland in 1995/6, and, in line with the UK figures, they accounted for just over a quarter of all applicant households (Scottish Office, 1997). These figures include 7,000 young single people aged 18 to 24 (17% of total applicants) and 3,400 young single people aged under 18 (8% of total). It is known that these figures seriously underestimate the scale of the problem as many young homeless people do not apply to local authorities for help or are not recorded as having done so.

Voluntary organisations therefore supply various 'guesstimates' of the scale of youth homelessness. Most recently, the Inquiry into Preventing Youth Homelessness (1996) has calculated that there were at least 246,000 young people homeless in the UK in 1995 - representing around one in thirty of this age group. The SCSH (1997) estimate that at least 20,000 young people become homeless in Scotland each year. However the accuracy of such figures is difficult to verify, not least because of the problems involved in identifying, contacting and counting homeless people. The various forms which homelessness may take and the range of definitions which exist are examined in Chapter 2.2.

Despite these shortcomings in the available information, it is clear that there is a serious problem of homelessness amongst young people in Scotland. The following sections explore the underlying causes of this crisis of youth homelessness.

### **Pathways to Independent Living**

Leaving the family home and establishing an independent household is a crucial aspect of young people's transition to adulthood. We consider here the routes which generally lead young people into independent living and identify those young people most likely to face difficulties. Emerging trends in leaving home and household formation patterns which are likely to have an impact on the incidence of homelessness are then discussed.



### *Leaving Home: Push, Pull and Support Factors*

The last Conservative Government sought to 'persuade' young people who are not economically independent to delay departure from the parental home until at least age 25, and in particular to discourage those under 18 from leaving (Heath, 1995). The National Child Development Study (1981) indicated that the median age for leaving home for the cohort born in 1958 was 21.9 years for men and 20 for women, and by age 23 84 per cent of women and 65 per cent of men had left the parental home (Bannister *et al*, 1993). The Scottish Young People's Study (1989) demonstrated that more than one third of young Scots had left home by age 19, and around one tenth had left by the time they were 18 (Jones, 1995a). Therefore despite the policies of the last Government it is far from unusual for young people to leave home in their teens, and the vast majority have left well before 25.

There are typically three sets of factors which influence the decision of young people to leave home and embark on independent living (Bannister *et al*, 1993). 'Pull' factors draw young people away from home. The pursuit of work, training or educational opportunities, and getting married or moving in with a partner are amongst these positive reasons to leave home. Similarly, the search for friends, independence and adventure may pull young people from the family home. 'Push' factors force some young people to leave home. These may involve family conflict, overcrowding, poverty, sexual abuse or violence. 'Support' factors are the resources which all young people require to make a successful transition to independent living. They include appropriate accommodation, an adequate level of income, and various forms of emotional and practical support. When the combination of these three factors grows strong enough to outweigh the advantages of living at home young people will move out.

### *Contrasting Pathways into Independent Living*

Reasons for leaving home are closely linked to age. There are three main 'waves' of home-leavers (Jones 1995a):

- The earliest leavers, under 18, tend to leave because of family conflict or to take up a job or to look for work

- The next wave are 18 year olds who leave mainly to go on a course
- Older leavers are more likely to leave to marry or cohabit

Women generally leave home earlier than men, mainly because they leave to marry or cohabit with men who are older than themselves. However single women are also more likely than single men to live independently of the parental home (Berrington and Murphy, 1994). Jones' study of 1981 data highlighted the importance of social class in relation to the age and reason for leaving home, and the 'reversibility' of the process (Jones, 1987a, p.71):

'The working class may typically remain in the parental home until marriage, when the move will be permanent, one way, and into marital housing. The middle class may leave home for educational reasons, at a younger age, return to the parental home after having ostensibly left it, and live in temporary, intermediate forms of living accommodation.'

Jones (1993a) has identified three 'housing consumer groups' of young people: single students, families and single workers. Young single workers (working, unemployed or training) are particularly vulnerable to homelessness because they have no particular niche in the housing market and the state does little to assist them into independent living. Also, these young people, from predominantly working class backgrounds, may not have ready access to parental financial support. Thus the pathway to independent living has always been somewhat precarious for young workers, but their position has worsened in recent years as a result of the social and economic trends discussed below. At greatest risk of homelessness are young people who leave home early, pushed out by 'negative' reasons, often ill-prepared and possibly damaged by their experiences (Bannister *et al*, 1993; Jones, 1995a). There is a wealth of evidence that care-leavers, young people from step-families and those who have suffered violence or sexual abuse at home are disproportionately represented amongst the young homeless (Caskie, 1992; Jones, 1993b; Thornton, 1990.) All of these groups are likely to embark on



independent living at a particularly young age, in difficult circumstances and without family support.

### *Emerging Trends*

There have been a number of important shifts in the reasons for young people leaving home in recent years. Fewer young people are now leaving home to marry (Ermisch *et al*, 1995), and there has been a significant increase in the numbers leaving to become students (Jones, 1995a). Jones also indicates that young people are increasingly leaving home to escape difficult family circumstances, and these are mainly very young home-leavers.

There are also significant trends regarding age at leaving home. A number of researchers have noted an apparent rise in the age at leaving the parental home (for example, Holmans, 1996). However most studies of leaving home are based on cross-sectional surveys of households which may lead to an over-estimation of age at first leaving home because they do not reveal whether those currently living there have ever left. We should therefore consider patterns of leaving home in relation to patterns of returning.

- The proportion of 19 year olds who had left home rose from 31 to 37 per cent of young men and 39 to 42 per cent of young women between 1987 and 1991. These are the latest figures available and suggest that the numbers of Scottish young people leaving home in their teenage years was actually increasing.
- However more young people were also returning home. Between 1987 and 1991 the proportion of home-leavers who had returned home to live by age 19 almost doubled from 15 to 28 per cent (Jones, 1993b).

The overall picture seems to be that: ‘young people are *first* leaving home earlier than they did in the mid-1980s, but that they may well *last* leave home later’ [my

emphasis] (Jones, 1993b, p.17). This means that the process of leaving home has become more prolonged and complex in recent years.

It also means that working class young people are more likely to be following the middle class pattern of returning to the family home. Some of these young people may choose to return, particularly as increasing numbers are leaving for non-marriage reasons, such as to become students, which are traditionally more 'reversible'. For others, however, the difficulties they face in trying to live independently may be forcing them to return against their will. Problems may be experienced within working class families where there is no tradition or expectation of adult children returning home.

These leaving home trends have influenced household formation patterns. The growth in numbers of young people leaving home for non-marriage reasons has meant that single person households are becoming significantly more common (Berrington and Murphy, 1994). The incidence of peer households also appears to be increasing, and although this is probably due primarily to an expanding student population, there may also be an emerging phenomenon of young workers sharing accommodation (Jones, 1995a). An increasing number of working class young people are therefore likely to experience an intermediate stage between living with their parents and living with a partner.

These trends have a number of implications in relation to youth homelessness. The trend for more young people to first leave home in their teens will tend to inflate the overall demand for youth housing, although this may be offset by the demographic factors discussed below. There is an expanding group of vulnerable home-leavers at 'risk' within the housing market because they are leaving at a young age and for negative reasons. More working class young people require transitional 'non-family' housing which is not as readily available to them as it is to the middle-classes.



## **Structural Changes Affecting Young People's Transitions to Independent Living**

Young people's transitions to adulthood have been transformed in recent years. According to Coles (1995, p.30) they have 'become more complex, take longer periods of time, and prove much more difficult to accomplish successfully'. I will concentrate here on the main housing, employment and family trends which have implications for the transition to independent living of the most vulnerable young people. These processes of social and economic change lie at the root of the present crisis of youth homelessness.

### *The Housing Market*

Both demand and supply within the British housing market has restructured in recent years in ways which generally operate to the disadvantage of young people.

#### Demand for Housing

The overall demand for housing has increased because there has been a substantial growth in the number of households, particularly single person households. In 1971 only 17 per cent of British households contained a single individual, by 1988 the figure had reached 26 per cent (Anderson, 1994). This rise in single person households is in line with wider European trends and is attributable to rising divorce rates and an ageing population, as well as a growing tendency for unmarried people, including young people, to live alone (Ermisch, 1990). Scottish Office household projections, based on past trends gauged from Census data, suggest that the number of Scottish households will increase from 2,067,000 in 1992 to 2,293,000 in 2006 (Scottish Office, 1995). Almost 95 per cent of this increase is accounted for by the predicted rise in one person households. If these projections are accurate, 35 per cent of all households in Scotland in 2006 will consist of a single person living alone, in comparison to just under 29 per cent in 1992.

Despite this overall growth in households, there is actually a projected decline in young households both in Britain and in Scotland over the next decade. The number of households headed by a person in the 15-29 age group in Scotland is

expected to fall from 303,370 in 1992 to 278,390 in 2006. This decline in young households is associated with a drop in the population of young people because of falling birth rates in the late 1960s and 1970s.

It has been argued that the pressure on the housing market in the 1980s was partly attributable to the maturation of the population bulge of the 'baby boom' cohort (Ermisch, 1990). It may therefore be expected that some of this pressure will be relieved in the 1990s as the 'baby bust' generation enters the housing market. However as the overall number of households will continue to increase because of other social and demographic trends, young people in Scotland will face greater competition for the available housing over the next few years, particularly single person accommodation. In any case, the number of younger households may not decline as projected because the drop in population may be offset by the trend for more young people to leave home earlier.

### Housing Supply

Government policies since 1979 have brought about a dramatic change in tenure structure. In Scotland, owner-occupation grew sharply from 35 per cent of the housing stock in 1981 to 57 per cent in 1994 (Scott and Parkey, 1996). Over the same period the public rented sector (including local authorities, Scottish Homes and New Towns) shrank from 53 per cent to 32 per cent of total housing stock. The private rented sector continued a long-term decline, dropping from 10 per cent in 1981 to less than 7 per cent in 1994. The housing association sector has more than doubled its stock since 1981, but still only accounts for around 4 per cent of housing in Scotland. The tenure structure in Scotland is still distinct from that of England, where owner-occupation accounts for 67 per cent of housing stock and the council sector only about a fifth of houses (McCrone and Stephens, 1995). Scotland's private rented sector is smaller than in England which has 10 per cent of its housing stock in this tenure (Earley, 1996).

It is widely argued that the overall impact of these tenure shifts is a severe shortage of affordable rented accommodation in Britain (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). McCrone and Stephens (1995) comment that the larger public rented sector in Scotland means that a deficit of rented accommodation is only apparent in

particular areas. However the available council housing may be of very poor quality and inappropriate to the households seeking accommodation because of its size and location.

### Young People in the Housing Market

Young people's position within each of the main sectors of the housing market is examined below.

#### Owner-Occupation

The expansion of owner-occupation has been encouraged by successive UK Governments, and owner-occupiers have traditionally enjoyed favourable tax treatment. The last Government developed a range of initiatives to encourage tenants in the public rented sector to become home-owners. The most significant was the 'Right to Buy' introduced in 1980. However home-ownership in the UK has suffered a series of setbacks in the 1990s, including unprecedented levels of negative equity, mortgage arrears and repossessions by mortgage lenders. These problems have, however, been somewhat less severe in Scotland (McCrone and Stephens, 1995). There is now less state support for owner-occupiers as Mortgage Interest Tax Relief is gradually being reduced, and Income Support (IS) for mortgage interest has been greatly restricted, particularly for first time buyers.

Access to owner-occupation is determined by market processes, and the most important criterion is the ability to secure and repay a mortgage. Financial deregulation in the 1980s led to mortgages becoming more readily available to groups such as young people. Thirty per cent of all heads of households under 25 in Scotland are owner-occupiers, but this age group still forms less than 3 per cent of home-owners (Scottish House Conditions Survey (SHCS), 1991). This is somewhat higher than the proportion of British heads of household under 25 who are home-owners (25%) (General Household Survey (GHS), 1994). This disparity may be accounted for by the lower and more stable house prices in Scotland, and the greater supply of small, tenemental flats appropriate for single people.

Home ownership in youth is mainly associated with couples, particularly those without children, rather than single people (Jones, 1995a). Owner-occupation is



not a realistic option for the majority of young single people because their incomes are insufficient to raise a mortgage. Also, they generally do not have the resources to pay for deposits and legal fees, or to furnish and equip an empty house. In any case, young people may not welcome the financial responsibilities or potential barriers to geographical mobility which home-ownership brings (Jones, 1995a) In the housing slump of the 1990s young owners with recent mortgages were particularly vulnerable to repossession (Anderson, 1994).

Therefore the expansion of owner-occupation in Scotland has not benefited the vulnerable young people with whom this research is concerned. Furthermore, where it has diminished the stock of rented housing available, for example through Right to Buy, it has been detrimental to their interests.

### Public Rented Sector

The public rented sector in Scotland has been shrinking as the result of the virtual cessation of new building by public sector landlords, and the loss of stock through transfers to sitting tenants and to other landlords. By 1995 310,000 Scottish public tenants had bought their homes under the 'Right to Buy' provisions. This has diminished not only the quantity but also the quality of public rented stock. Most sales have been of desirable properties in high amenity areas, leaving a residualised council sector containing a high proportion of low-demand housing in peripheral schemes on the edge of the major towns and cities. As better-off tenants have exercised the Right to Buy, and have been encouraged to do so by a sharp rise in council house rents, the concentration of poor and vulnerable tenants in the public sector has increased. Since 1988 councils have been encouraged to transfer their stock to alternative landlords. By 1995 more than 13,000 council houses had been transferred, mainly to housing associations (Scott and Parkey, 1996).

Access to the public rented sector is generally on the basis of housing need. There are two routes into council housing: via the waiting list and through the homeless persons legislation. The homelessness provisions are discussed in Chapter 1.3 as they form a crucial part of the network of responses to young homeless people. As regards the waiting list, public landlords have wide discretion in determining their allocation priorities. Young people can take up tenancies from age 16 in Scotland,

and local authorities are not permitted to discriminate against them on the basis of age as regards admission to the waiting list or allocation of housing. The legislation on allocations was amended in England and Wales by the last Conservative Government but there were no statutory changes in Scotland.

Allocation policies are usually based on groups or categories of households and points awarded for various 'housing need' factors, and most policies give some weighting to the length of time an applicant has been on the waiting list (Scott and Parkey, 1996). These policies tend to give priority to families with children rather than single people or childless couples (Anderson, 1994). However Dyer's (1993) survey of Scottish local authority waiting lists found that 44 per cent of applicants wished to set up a single person household. This study also revealed that applicants are generally young with nearly half aged under 30 (39% between 20-29 and 9% between 16-19.)

It has been widely argued that the diminishing stock of public sector housing has made it necessary to target allocations on particularly vulnerable households, and this will make it even more difficult for young, single people to gain access to public housing. In Britain as a whole 24 per cent of heads of household under 25 live in public rented housing (GHS, 1994). However Scotland's larger public rented sector absorbs almost half of this age group (48%) (SHCS, 1991). It should be noted that many of the households in these British and Scottish figures will be young families rather than single people. The proportion of council tenants who are under 25 is similar in both Scotland and Britain as a whole (around 5%).

The fact that council housing is more readily available in Scotland does not necessarily mean that it meets the needs of young people. The unsatisfactory quality and location of much Scottish council housing has already been discussed. As young, single people constitute a low priority group they will often be allocated the least popular housing. This is likely to be particularly true of those who gain access to housing under the homeless persons provisions (Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 1994). Most houses are family sized rather than appropriate to single people, and Pedreschi (1991) has shown that a large proportion of authorities in Scotland limit single people's eligibility for such housing to



difficult-to-let areas. The lack of new building means that public sector landlords are constrained by the existing stock profile, consisting of mainly 3 and 4 apartment dwellings, and cannot develop appropriate smaller properties to meet the growing demands of single applicants (Thornton, 1990). The vast majority of council and other public sector housing is unfurnished, and it is difficult for young people on low incomes to take up these tenancies because of the restrictions of the Social Fund (discussed in Chapter 1.3).

The reductions in the quantity and quality of council housing have had serious consequences for young people in Scotland, who rely on it to a far greater extent than their counterparts in the rest of the Britain.

### Private Rented Sector

The decline of the private rented sector has been attributed to rent control and tax disadvantages which have made it less profitable than other types of investment (McCrone and Stephens, 1995). The last Government attempted to revitalise private renting by replacing 'fair' rents with 'market' rents, and by making it easier for landlords to repossess houses. They also extended the Business Expansion Scheme to offer tax breaks to those investing in rented housing for a minimum five year period. Research in Scotland suggested that there had been an expansion at the upper end of the private rented market between 1987 and 1994, but a decline in the bottom end (Bailey, 1996).

In 1991 the private rented sector consisted of around 130,000 properties split evenly between the tied, unfurnished and furnished sectors (Young, 1996). The tied and unfurnished sectors were concentrated in rural Scotland, whereas furnished accommodation consisted mainly of tenement flats in urban areas. Most of the recent decline in the private rented sector in Scotland has been in unfurnished accommodation and the furnished sector has declined very little in the past few years (Kemp, 1994).

Young people are concentrated in the private rented sector, particularly in furnished accommodation. Young (1996) reported that one-third of all household heads in the furnished sector in Scotland were under 24, compared with only 4 per



cent of Scottish households. The role of private renting in accommodating young adults in Scotland may not appear large in absolute terms as the SHCS (1991) indicated that only 18.5 per cent of all household heads under age 25 are private tenants. However many more young people pass through this transitional sector as part of their housing careers, and the proportions are much higher at the younger ages (Jones, 1995a). Nevertheless the private rented sector is much less significant in relation to Scottish young people than it is to their English counterparts, as 41 per cent of heads of household under 25 in Britain rent from a private landlord (GHS, 1994). This is the flip-side of the much larger proportion of young Scottish households in the public rented sector.

Occupancy of the private rented sector in youth has traditionally been a mainly middle-class phenomenon, but the leaving home trends reported above may mean that more working class young people are now in need of this transitional accommodation. However the small size of the stock constrains the number of young people this sector can accommodate. In any case Kemp and Rhodes (1994) found that young, single people were the type of household Scottish private landlords least preferred to let to.

Access to private rented accommodation is determined by market processes and the key factor is ability to pay. There are three main economic barriers to access for young people on low incomes. First, the restrictions of the Social Fund have made it much more difficult to obtain payments for deposits or rent in advance which are normally required to secure a private tenancy. Second, rents in private furnished accommodation have risen over the past few years and are much higher than in the social rented sector (Young, 1996). Private tenants are eligible for Housing Benefit (HB), but there is evidence that most private landlords would prefer not to let to tenants in receipt of benefit (Kemp and Rhodes, 1994). There are also additional restrictions on HB to single tenants aged under 25 in the private rented sector (discussed in Chapter 1.3). Third, people on low incomes may now have less access to the private rented sector because there are fewer lets available at the bottom end of the market and more accommodation targeted at higher income groups (Bailey, 1996).

Private renting has a number of drawbacks for young people. It is expensive, and the accommodation is often of poor quality and insecure. On the other hand, the private rented sector has several advantages for this age group. It offers access on demand, and allows geographical mobility not afforded by the more secure tenures of council housing and owner-occupation. Furthermore, furnished private accommodation allows young people to set up home relatively cheaply. Private renting is therefore often considered an important housing option for young, single people (Anderson, 1994).

For these reasons, the limited availability of private rented housing for young people in Scotland is a continuing source of concern.

### Housing Associations

In 1989 the previous Government adopted housing associations as the main providers of new social rented housing in Britain, and at the same time reclassified them as part of the 'independent' rented sector (Scott and Parkey, 1996). Associations have had their level of capital subsidy reduced, and therefore have had to rely increasingly on private lenders to fund their development and renovation programmes. In consequence, rent levels have increased and there have been concerns expressed about affordability in this sector (Anderson, 1994), although the situation is not yet as acute in Scotland where subsidies have remained higher.

Like the public rented sector, housing association accommodation is broadly allocated on the basis of need. However in contrast to local authorities, associations have traditionally played an important role in housing single people, and many provide specialist accommodation for particular groups such as the young homeless (Anderson, 1994). The GHS (1994) indicates that 9 per cent of British heads of household aged under 25 are housing association tenants, but in Scotland the equivalent figure was only 4 per cent (SHCS, 1991).

Households may gain access to housing association accommodation either directly through the association's waiting list, or indirectly through local authority nominations. As well as offering mainstream housing of an appropriate size for



single people, many associations provide hostel accommodation, furnished flats and supported housing for young people. However the movement is severely constrained in the extent to which it can meet the needs of young people by the small size of its stock. Williams (1992) has also suggested that some associations may be reluctant to let to young people because of anticipated management problems. The potential problems relating to affordability in this sector apply with even greater force to young people because their earnings are much lower than average. This poses particular problems in furnished accommodation projects where the additional costs are covered by high rents.

Housing associations are therefore an important, and growing, source of accommodation for young, single people but their housing stock is still far too small to meet the bulk of housing demand from this age group.

### Summary

Housing market trends have reduced the supply of affordable, rented housing in Scotland, and there is increasing competition for the single person accommodation required by many young people. The 'major' tenures of the public rented sector and owner-occupation do seem more accessible to young people in Scotland than in Britain as a whole, however they often do not offer accommodation suitable for this age group. The fact that a far smaller proportion of young Scots are private sector tenants may reflect greater difficulties in gaining access to the 'transitional' accommodation provided by this sector. Thus the expansion in youth homelessness may be attributed in part to an insufficient supply of appropriate accommodation to meet the growing housing demands of young people.

### *The Labour Market*

The second, and I would argue most important, set of structural changes underlying the growth in youth homelessness relate to the employment opportunities and income levels of young people.

### The School to Work Transition

The transition from school to work has become much more complex in recent years. In the 1950s and 1960s most young people simply left school at fifteen and

went straight into a job. However the proportion of 16 year old school leavers entering employment fell from 53 per cent in 1976 to 15 per cent in 1986 in England and Wales (Jones and Wallace, 1992). This fall was due to the increasing tendency of young people to remain in full-time education beyond 16, the growth in youth unemployment, and the emergence of a 'surrogate' labour market through youth training schemes.

### The Youth Labour Market

The British labour market began to fundamentally restructure in the 1970s. Unemployment rose sharply as traditional manufacturing industries started to decline and the demand for unskilled and manual labour diminished. There was a shift away from permanent, full-time employment towards temporary, casual and part-time work. Sectors of the labour market which were traditionally dominated by women expanded, while many of those generally occupied by men diminished. The power of trade unions was undermined by widespread unemployment and the contraction of traditional industries, and they were less able to protect their members' conditions and pay levels. Many of these long-term trends were accelerated from 1979 onwards by a Conservative Government intent on cutting public expenditure and introducing a de-regulated 'flexible' labour market (Jones and Wallace, 1992).

Official unemployment rose dramatically in the 1980s to a peak of just over 3 million in 1986. It dropped down to around 1.7 million in 1990 before climbing to another peak of just below 3 million in 1992 (Employment Gazette, September 1995). In contrast to the 1980s recession, there was some convergence of regional unemployment rates across the UK in the 1990s, however the most significant trend identified was the greater concentration of unemployment in large cities relative to small towns and rural areas. Within cities, there is evidence of increasing spatial concentration of unemployed people and other disadvantaged groups in particular neighbourhoods (McGregor and McConnachie, 1995). This concentration of poverty and unemployment has accompanied a general growth in inequality over the last two decades in developed countries, which has been particularly pronounced in the UK (Hills, 1995).



To a large extent, young people have borne the brunt of these economic and policy upheavals. Youth unemployment has grown dramatically, and has outstripped adult rates throughout the 1980s and 90s. In April 1995, for example, 17.2 per cent of men aged 20-24 were registered unemployed and 8.3 per cent of women in this age group, in comparison to an average of 11.4 per cent for all males and 4.6 per cent for all females (Employment Gazette, September 1995). The Labour Force Survey for 1994 shows that almost one quarter of 16 and 17 year olds were unemployed (Chatrik and Maclagan, 1995). This figure should be seen in a historical context: in 1976 only 3 per cent of 16 year olds were unemployed.

Young people at the bottom end of the labour market with few qualifications have been most affected. Structural changes in the labour market have hit them particularly hard by cutting off their traditional route into work through apprenticeship schemes or unskilled labour. A recent report by the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) (1995, p.30) drew particular attention to the position of unskilled young males:

'For many in this group the prospect is not just one of looking for work and waiting until an application is successful, but a state of more or less permanent economic inactivity in which employment and the lifestyle associated with it are simply not attainable.'

The young people I interviewed are at the very sharpest end of these trends: school-leavers with few or no qualifications living in areas of multiple deprivation.

### Training Schemes

Recognition that young people were structurally disadvantaged in the labour market can be traced back to the 1970s (Jones and Wallace, 1992). Some commentators attributed this to their lack of appropriate training and preparation for work. The Youth Opportunities Programme was therefore introduced in 1978 by the Labour Government to provide 6 month training programmes for unemployed young people. It was replaced by the Conservatives in 1983 with the Youth Training Scheme (YTS). This was initially a one year course but was

extended to two years in 1986. By the mid-1980s the YTS had expanded to cater for more than a quarter of all 16 year olds (Jones and Wallace, 1992). YTS gained much greater significance in 1988 when entitlement to social security benefits was withdrawn from under 18s and instead they were 'guaranteed' a youth training place (see below). YTS was renamed Youth Training (YT) in 1990. Training and Enterprise Councils (TECS) in England and Wales and Local Enterprise Companies (LECS) in Scotland now administer the training schemes. YT was re-styled 'Youth Credits' in 1996, under which young people are provided with vouchers to 'buy' their own training from a number of approved providers; however the scheme remains very similar to YT.

These training schemes have been severely criticised. First, the YT 'guarantee' has often not been met because insufficient places have been provided (MacLagan, 1992). For example, Strathclyde Poverty Alliance (SPA) (1992) published evidence from the Careers Service that there was a consistent shortfall in YT places in every part of Strathclyde in 1991. However the Employment Department has attempted to rectify the situation and there are now stringent targets for delivery of sufficient training places (NACRO, 1995).

Second, young people may be offered training which they do not consider appropriate, and there is some compulsion on them to take such places because of the connections with the benefit system. SPA (1992) have argued that much YT training is of poor quality, and that YT courses, and their predecessors, have a reputation for exploiting young people as cheap labour and providing poor employment prospects for ex-trainees. There is certainly evidence of widespread disenchantment with government training schemes amongst young people (Mizen, 1995; Raffe, 1989). There is recognition, however, that some young people do have positive experiences of training. Jones and Wallace (1992, p.42), for example, comment that:

'Schemes were highly variable: some trainees were used by employers as cheap substitutes for regular workers and were dismissed at the end of their training, but in other cases schemes were used as the basis of firm training and recruitment into jobs.'



Unfortunately, the disadvantaged young people with whom this thesis is concerned seem likely to find themselves at the bottom end of the training hierarchy.

### Youth Incomes: Wages and Benefits

Youth incomes have declined considerably in real terms since the 1970s. Young people's wages have been falling further behind those of adults, in part the deliberate result of the Conservative Government's policy that they should 'price themselves back into work' (Jones and Wallace, 1992, p.37). By 1992 full-time male employees aged 16 and 17 earned only one-third of the average full-time male wage (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994).

The economic position of unemployed young people has deteriorated even more seriously. Changes to the benefit system are discussed in detail in Chapter 1.3 and are summarised briefly here. Young people aged 16 and 17 have been the worst affected. They lost their entitlement to IS in 1988, except in certain exceptional circumstances, and those who do still manage to qualify are paid benefit at a lower rate than over 18s. Unemployed 16 and 17 year olds may be entitled to a 'Bridging Allowance' of £15 a week for a maximum of 8 weeks in a 52 week period, and they may also apply for IS on grounds of 'severe hardship'. In place of entitlement to IS, 16 and 17 year olds were 'guaranteed' a YT place (now Youth Credits). Allowances paid under these training schemes are considerably lower than wages paid to young workers by employers, and have been allowed to erode with inflation (Coles, 1995).

Since 1988 unemployed young people aged 18 to 24 have received lower rates of IS than those over 25. Young people under 25 have also, since 1988, been disadvantaged in relation to HB, and further restrictions were implemented in 1996. The Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) introduced in 1996 to replace Unemployment Benefit (UB) and IS means that 18-24 year olds who would previously have been able to claim UB will lose money.

## Summary

The declining economic position of young people has left them at a serious disadvantage in the housing market and, as we shall see later, has created severe difficulties within many of their families. This has made this age group much more vulnerable to homelessness. The most damaging factor has been the reduction in young people's entitlement to social security benefits, and this is clearly illustrated by the sharp rise in youth homelessness in the late 1980s following the implementation of these changes (Oldman, 1997).

## *The Family*

A key thrust of the Conservative Government's social policy was to emphasise family responsibility for young people: both as a means of limiting state expenditure and reducing the incidence of juvenile delinquency by re-asserting parental authority. However Jones (1995b) has highlighted the paucity of research to test the assumption that parents will step in to support young people when state safety nets are withdrawn. Nevertheless the response of the last Government to youth homelessness was to (Jones and Wallace, 1992, p.112):

'encourage young people to delay leaving home by withdrawing their social security entitlement so that they remain economically dependent on their parents and live in the parental home, rather than by providing young people with realistic incomes and housing.'

If young people nevertheless did leave home, the previous Government's policy was to encourage them to return if they risked homelessness. As reported above, it does appear that an increasing proportion of young people are returning home. However studies of youth homelessness have consistently demonstrated that not all young people are able to return home, and many face extreme hardship if denied support from the state (see Chapter 3.1).

Forcing young people to rely on their families is particularly problematic in the present of widespread social change which means that increasing numbers of children are being brought up in 'non-conventional' families. Largely as the result



of increasing divorce rates, the number of children living in families receiving one-parent benefit has almost doubled in Scotland from 44,000 in 1980 to 87,000 in 1991 (Campbell, 1995). One in six families in Scotland with dependent children are headed by a lone parent (usually female), however in Strathclyde this figure rises to one in four, and in Glasgow it is one in three (Hartnoll, 1995). In Britain as a whole, estimates based on the GHS (1990-2) indicate that around 16 per cent of children live with a lone parent. Step-families have also become more common, with the GHS (1990-92) indicating that around 8 per cent of British children are living in reconstituted families where their natural parent has either remarried or is cohabiting (Haskey, 1995). These are snapshot surveys, and more young people will experience these situations in the course of their childhood. Kiernan and Wicks' (1990) projections suggest that by the turn of the century only around 50 per cent of young people will be brought up by both their married natural parents for their entire childhood.

Conservatives have attributed many social problems such as crime, drug abuse and dependence on welfare benefits to these changing family forms (Carlson, 1993). More progressive commentators have generally taken the view that families are being 're-constructed' rather than disintegrating (Jones and Wallace, 1992). However research by Kiernan (1992) has indicated that young people who experience the breakdown of their parents' marriage do appear to be disadvantaged because they make key youth transitions, including leaving school and entering the labour market and leaving home, earlier than other young people. Step-children had more accelerated transitions than children of lone parents, and young men seemed more adversely affected by living in a step-family than young women. Kiernan (1992, p.233) believes that that the explanation for these results is likely to lie in 'the complex nature of, and sometimes conflict ridden, family relationships that result from re-marriage.'

Jones (1995a) also found that having a step-parent was one of the main predictive factors associated with leaving home early. By 19 years old 44 per cent of those with a step-parent (4% of the total sample) had left home, as compared with 33 per cent of those with a lone parent (13% of the total sample) and only 27 per cent of those with their two natural parents. Young people with step-parents also

disproportionately left home because of 'family problems' (nearly 23% of step-sons and 40% of step-daughters gave this reason). Young people with a lone parent were less likely than those with a step-parent, but more likely than those who had been living with their two natural parents, to say that they had left home because of problems. Jones (1995b) also found that young people from step-families had greater difficulties in obtaining family support than other young people.

However economic as well as social trends affect the ability of families to support young people. Rising levels of unemployment and poverty have been loaded particularly heavily onto families with dependent children in recent years (Donnison, 1995). Lone parent families, particularly those headed by single (never-married) parents, are considerably poorer on average than two parent families. This is likely to explain some of the disadvantages suffered by young people brought up in such families (Coles, 1995). The cuts in social security benefits to young people have made them a drain on the budgets of families already under pressure. This may exacerbate stress within a family to the point where a young person is ejected and subsequently becomes homeless (see Chapter 3.1). Therefore, as Oldman (1997) has pointed out, these social security policies have had quite the reverse impact of their supposed intention to discourage family break-up.

To summarise, the assumption that all young people have a family able and willing to support them is clearly untrue. It is a position which is increasingly difficult to sustain given these changes in family structure and rising levels of family poverty. Also, the changes in the youth labour market discussed earlier have extended the period of young people's economic dependency. The additional financial responsibilities being placed on families for lengthening periods of time smacks of middle class assumptions and patterns of behaviour being imposed on working class households at a time when they are increasingly unable to bear them.



## **The Research Focus**

The focus of my research must be understood in the context of previous studies of homelessness amongst young people. There is a wealth of research on youth homelessness in Britain. However most of it is funded and published by campaigning groups, such as Shelter, or by Government Departments. Until recently there was little rigorous academic study of the topic, but there has been more 'independent' research on homelessness over the past few years. The more significant academic and pressure groups studies which will be drawn upon in the thesis are summarised below. All of this literature is more extensively reviewed in the substantive chapters of the thesis, and is simply highlighted here to explain the priorities for my own research.

The most important work in Scotland has been by Jones (1993a&b). She carried out a multi-method research project which investigated the links between leaving home, young people's position in the housing market and youth homelessness. Other publications by this author on the related topics of leaving home patterns and family support have also been extensively utilised in the thesis (Jones, 1995a&b). The other major study of youth homelessness in Scotland was conducted by Bannister *et al* (1993). They focused on the role of social work services in the prevention and management of homelessness amongst young people. Valuable data on youth homelessness in Scotland was provided by a survey of more than 2,500 young people referred to 'Stopover' hostels in 1992/93 (SCSH and Shelter (Scotland), 1994). Earlier research by Shelter (Scotland) into the links between social work care and homelessness, and the response of local housing authorities to young homeless people have also been used in the thesis (Caskie, 1992 & 1993). Webb's (1994) investigation into hidden homelessness amongst single women is the main study addressing gender issues and homelessness in Scotland and is extensively reviewed in this thesis.

Turning to British research, the most important contributors have probably been Hutson and Liddiard (1994) who have extensively researched the topic of youth homelessness in Wales. Their book covers a wide range of issues including young people's experiences of homelessness, the public presentation of young homeless people by the media and helping agencies, and solutions to youth homelessness.



Thornton's (1990) report on the response of English local authorities to young homeless people is mainly useful for its analysis of the causes of youth homelessness. Anderson *et al* (1993) conducted a large scale survey of single homeless people in England living in hostels, bed and breakfast hotels and sleeping rough. This contains data on the characteristics and experiences of the young, single homeless. CHAR have now published the Inquiry Into Preventing Youth Homelessness (1996) which synthesises information on homelessness amongst young people throughout the UK. Greve's (1991) review of homelessness in Britain provides an account of the broader context within which youth homelessness should be considered.

Thus there is a considerable amount known about youth homelessness both in Scotland and in Britain as a whole. However extensive gaps still remain in our understanding of this phenomenon, as will become clear in the course of the thesis, and my doctoral study aimed to make a contribution towards filling some of the more important ones.

Most research on youth homelessness has been of a cross-sectional, static nature. While snapshot surveys do provide a range of useful data, they have only limited usefulness in aiding our understanding of homelessness because they tell us little about how people came to be homeless, nor help us to predict what is likely to happen to them in the future. Some studies have traced the history of homeless people, but very few have attempted to follow-up respondents in order to track their progress prospectively. Therefore the main priority for further research identified by the principal academic authors in the field, Jones (1995a) and Hutson and Liddiard (1994), was the 'processes' of youth homelessness.

The few studies which have explicitly analysed the dynamics of youth homelessness have tended to present a rather homogeneous picture of young homeless people experiencing a uniform 'downward spiral' (for example, Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1994; Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). Thus very broad brush conclusions have been offered, with little attempt to discern different patterns and experiences within the young homeless population. Further study of

the processes of youth homelessness therefore required a more detailed approach to examining the range of routes through homelessness which exist.

Another gap in the existing literature was a lack of research which related homelessness to a local context. Locating studies of homelessness in particular communities enables structural factors which shape homeless experiences, such as local housing and job opportunities, to be brought into sharp focus. It also allows 'hidden' homelessness in local neighbourhoods to be investigated. This dimension of youth homelessness has often been neglected in previous research which has generally focused on young people in contact with specialist homelessness agencies or sleeping rough in city centre locations.

I have a particular interest in gender relationships in society, and in this regard there was plainly a gap in the homelessness literature. Traditionally, most research on homelessness has concentrated on men, but a number of more recent studies have focused on women's experience of homelessness (Dibblin, 1991; Watson with Austerberry, 1986; Webb, 1994). However there appeared to be little research which directly compared the experiences of men and women and therefore could claim to offer a rigorous analysis of gender issues within homelessness.

The central aim of my study was to illuminate the nature of youth homelessness by investigating the experiences of young people from a particular residential neighbourhood. The neighbourhood I selected was Drumchapel in Glasgow (see Chapter 1.5). I sought to explore the processes involved in youth homelessness by investigating whether there were subgroups within the young homeless population who took separate routes through homelessness. The intention was to use this detailed analysis to help fine-tune policy responses to young homeless people. A particular emphasis was given to comparing the experiences of young men and young women throughout the research. The next section of this chapter outlines the conceptual framework within which I pursued these research aims.



## **The Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework employed in the thesis draws mainly on ideas within housing studies and youth sociology, both fields with a direct bearing on the topic of youth homelessness.

In youth sociology attempts have been made to develop a new conceptual framework which integrates the longitudinal processes of transition to adulthood with the structural context of youth, particularly social inequalities between groups of young people (Jones and Wallace, 1992). For example, Wallace (1987) and the ESRC's 16-19 Initiative (Bynner, 1990) both used the notion of 'career trajectories' to distinguish between unequal groups of young people, rather than snapshot assessments of their economic positions. Similarly, Jones (1987b) created a longitudinal typology of 'Youth Classes' which identified six different mobility routes of young people through social class.

In housing studies there has also been some movement away from cross-sectional research towards more dynamic approaches (Clapham *et al*, 1994). For example, Payne and Payne (1977) investigated stratification within the housing market by tracking the progress of young families in Aberdeen. By comparing the proportions of households in different tenures at the birth of first, second or subsequent child, they identified three main 'housing pathways', that is, sharply differentiated routes through the housing market. This work helped to develop a notion of process within the housing system and differentiated between unequal groups in a dynamic way, thus counteracting the static nature of analyses such as the 'housing classes' model (Rex and Moore, 1967). Forrest and Murie (1991) took a more qualitative approach to examining progress through the housing market by compiling detailed housing histories over individuals' lifetimes. As housing histories were traced back to birth their study had a wider scope than Payne and Payne's, and their qualitative data provided a deeper analysis of the factors influencing housing pathways. It also allowed exploration of individuals' perceptions of their housing experiences.

The life-course perspective has been advocated as a means of carrying forward these dynamic perspectives in both youth sociology (Jones and Wallace, 1992)



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The life-course perspective has been advocated as a means of carrying forward these dynamic perspectives in both youth sociology (Jones and Wallace, 1992)

and housing studies (Clapham *et al*, 1994). This involves analysing social phenomena through a focus on individuals' personal biographies (Haraven, quoted in Jones and Wallace, 1992, p.13):

'The life-course approach is concerned with the movement of individuals over their own lives and through historical time and with the relationship of family members to each other as they travel through personal and historical time.'

So a life-course analysis involves a particular focus on the relationship of family or household members to each other. It also emphasises individuals' own perceptions of their experiences. It should be viewed as a more sophisticated version of the life-cycle approach. Cohen (1987, p.1) explains in the introduction to her edited volume on the topic:

'The term 'life course' is used here rather than the more familiar 'life cycle', as the latter implies fixed categories in the life of the individual and assumes a stable social system, whereas the former allows of more flexible biographical patterns within a continually changing social system.'

Taking this life course approach, Jones and Wallace (1992, p.13) argue that:

'Youth can be seen as a series of processes and transitions to adult life, roughly parallel longitudinal processes which take place in different spheres, such as at home or in the labour market, but which must be understood together because they relate closely to one another. The biographical approach requires that the lives of the young are seen as an integrated whole.'

This holistic emphasis is probably the principal strength of the life-course approach. In particular, it enables us to re-unite the public sphere of people's lives, for instance in school or work, with the private sphere of family and home. On the other hand, its principal weakness is that the micro focus on individuals and

households can lead to undue weight being given to the impact of individual choice in social outcomes and a neglect of the constraints which structure those choices. The balance to be struck between individual agency and structural factors in explaining social phenomenon is a central debate in sociological theory. Jones and Wallace suggest that Giddens' theory of 'structuration' provides a useful middle ground between the extremes of 'structuralism', which can be over-deterministic, and 'individualisation', which can over-stress self-determination.

Giddens (1981) argues that social systems, both their reproduction and transformation, are the product of the intended and unintended consequences of human action. The 'transformative capacity' of human actors to change social systems is at the heart of structuration theory. Giddens (p.54) rejects the conception of human beings as 'determined objects' or as unambiguously 'free subjects', instead he argues:

'All human action is carried on by knowledgeable agents who both construct the social world through their action, but yet whose action is also conditioned or constrained by the very world of their creation.'

Within structuration theory social structures must be understood not only as constraining action but also permitting it. Furthermore, social structures don't merely surround an individual, but also permeate their minds and thus influence their decisions and actions. Thus the meanings and behaviour of individuals must always be interpreted in the light of an analysis of structural forces.

There are a number of points here relevant to my study. First, it is crucial to place qualitative biographical accounts firmly in the context of the structural constraints operating to limit people's choices. Second, people's attitudes and actions must be considered in relation to these structural influences. Third, giving due emphasis to structural constraints does not oblige us to view individuals as completely passive. Rather, they should be viewed as having some scope for negotiation and individual agency. However in an unequal society, such as ours, the scope for self-



determination will vary from individual to individual, with some being more constrained and having fewer opportunities than others.

The conceptual framework was developed from these bodies of literature. The core of my approach was to investigate distinctions between young homeless people in a dynamic way by studying the varying 'pathways' through homelessness they followed. Drawing on the life course perspective, I placed young people's experiences of homelessness in the context of their biographies as a whole, and throughout the thesis emphasised their perceptions and motivations. The thesis has a holistic character, with chapters not only on young people's routes through housing and homelessness, but also on their 'private' lives of family and friendship networks, and their 'public' lives of school, work and contact with public services. Bearing in mind the above discussion on the interplay between agency and structure in social outcomes, I sought to assess how much control young homeless people had over what happened to them. This was helped by locating the research in a particular community which allowed a clear picture of the structural factors shaping these young people's opportunities and attitudes to be developed.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of youth homelessness, and introduced the research focus and conceptual framework for my study. Chapters 1.4 and 1.5 describe the methods and location of the research. However first it is necessary to summarise the current framework of responses to youth homelessness from statutory and voluntary services.

## **CHAPTER 1.3: RESPONSES TO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**

This chapter begins by outlining the statutory framework of responsibilities towards young homeless people, and then comments briefly upon the role of the voluntary and private sectors in relation to youth homelessness. Specific initiatives which have been developed, or proposed, to meet the needs of young homeless people are then introduced. This chapter provides a general overview of agencies in the field of youth homelessness. The service network in Glasgow and in Drumchapel will be presented in Chapter 1.5.

### **Statutory Agencies**

The main statutory agencies with responsibility for young homeless people are: local authority housing departments; local authority social work departments; and the Benefits Agency. With local government reorganisation in April 1996, responsibility for housing was transferred from district councils to the new unitary authorities, and social work services were transferred from regional councils to these new authorities.

#### *Housing Department*

It is the specific duties which housing departments have towards homeless people which are discussed here. The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 (now consolidated into the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987) provides that local authorities have a duty to secure permanent accommodation for households which become homeless ‘unintentionally’, provided they belong to a ‘priority’ group such as families with dependent children. The permanent accommodation provided does not have to be a council house but normally will be. People who do not qualify as having a priority need are simply entitled to ‘advice and assistance’. Most single people are not considered to have a priority need unless they are assessed as particularly ‘vulnerable’. Persons who have a priority need but are homeless ‘intentionally’ are only entitled to temporary accommodation for a limited period, typically 28 days, and advice and assistance. Local authorities may transfer responsibility for the permanent rehousing of priority households which have no local connection with their area to a local authority with which they do have a local connection. Local authorities are required to ‘have regard’ to a Code of



Guidance accompanying the homelessness legislation but are not obliged to follow it.

As reported in Chapter 1.2, a high proportion of applicants under the homeless persons legislation are young and single. The Code of Guidance in operation when I conducted the research specified that 16 and 17 year olds at risk of sexual or financial exploitation, young people over 17 at risk of similar exploitation, and recent care-leavers were amongst the groups which may be considered 'vulnerable' and thus entitled to 'priority' status.

Shelter (Scotland) surveyed Scottish local authorities on their policies towards young homeless people in 1990 and again in 1992 (Caskie, 1993). The author concluded that there had been encouraging policy developments in these two years but there remained much room for improvement. For example, in 1990 only 12 authorities (24%) deemed all 16 and 17 year olds as having a priority need, and this had increased to 20 authorities (40%) by 1992. Research carried out by the Scottish Office in 1993 indicated that this figure had risen again to 32 authorities (57%) (Dyer, 1993). However Caskie also found that only 2 authorities automatically classified young people up to age 21 as having a priority need in 1992, and only 11 authorities accepted as vulnerable all young people with a background of local authority care.

Official statistics indicate that in 1995/6 around half of single young people aged under 18 presenting to Scottish local authorities were assessed as having a priority need, but only 16 per cent of those aged 18 to 24 were given priority status (Scottish Office, 1997).

The last Conservative Government amended the homelessness legislation in England and Wales to limit local authorities' duties towards the statutorily homeless to providing temporary accommodation for a two year period (Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 1998). This change was implemented despite overwhelming support for the status quo from those who responded to the consultation exercise. There have been no statutory changes in Scotland as yet. However the House of Lords has recently ruled that even under the legislative



framework still operational in Scotland accommodation provided to homeless families need not be permanent in nature, although it must be offered indefinitely (R v Brent LBC *ex p.* Awua [1995] 1 A.C. 55).

The draft new Scottish Code of Guidance on homelessness which was issued for consultation by the last Government highlighted the Awua case and advised Scottish local authorities that they simply have a power, rather than a duty, to offer permanent housing to homeless applicants. If this guidance is translated into practice it would seriously undermine the position of homeless people in Scotland. This draft Code also removed the reference to the vulnerability of young people over 17 at risk of exploitation, and has thus been criticised by Shelter (Scotland) for undermining the protection given to homeless young people. On the other hand, it does add drug and solvent abuse as possible risks suggesting vulnerability. The draft Code also amends the reference to 'recent care-leavers' to 'care-leavers under 19', which may be interpreted as more or less generous to such young people depending on the age at which they left care.

To summarise, there is clearly an incomplete safety net for young homeless people in that fewer than half of 16 and 17 year olds, and less than a fifth of 18-24 year olds, who seek the help of local authorities are accepted as having a priority need and therefore being eligible for rehousing. However policies and practices vary significantly between local authorities (Caskie, 1993), and Glasgow City Council, where my study was based, has relatively generous policies towards the young homeless.

### *Social Work Department*

The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 transferred primary responsibility for homeless persons from social work to housing departments. Since then social work departments have had only a general legal duty to assist housing authorities to discharge their homelessness functions if they are requested to do so (Bannister *et al*, 1993).

However social work departments have specific responsibilities towards children who are in, or have been in, local authority care. This is highly relevant here

because, as is discussed below, a large proportion of young homeless people have a care background. The relevant legislative framework when I did my fieldwork was the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. However the amendments relating to social work care introduced by the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 came into force in October 1996. Thus both sets of statutory provisions are summarised below. Young homeless people may also have a right to assistance from the social work department because they are part of another specific client group to whom they have statutory responsibilities. This would include young people who fall within a 'community care' group because they are mentally ill or handicapped, or physically disabled (Bannister *et al*, 1993). Social work departments also have statutory responsibility to young people on probation. Thus social work services are a crucial part of the safety net of responses to young homeless people.

I summarise below the legal framework of social work responsibilities to children and young people, and review current evidence on young people's experience of social work services and the response of these services to youth homelessness.

### The Legal Framework

The 1968 Act made provision for children to come into 'voluntary' (with the agreement of their parents) social work care up to the age of 17, and they could be subject to compulsory measures of care ordered by the Children's Hearing until they reach 18. The Hearing could order supervision of the child at home, or away from home with relatives or foster parents or in a residential establishment.

Young care-leavers could be assisted under S12 of the 1968 Act, which imposed a general duty on social work authorities to promote social welfare in their area by providing advice and assistance. There is also a power under this section to give assistance in kind, or in exceptional circumstances in cash, to children under 18 if this is likely to help keep the child out of local authority care. There were also specific aftercare responsibilities. Local authorities were empowered to contribute to the cost of accommodation and maintenance of young people up to 21, so long as they were in care after ceasing to be of school age. They also had a duty to provide advice, guidance and assistance to young people under 18 who left care after the school leaving date. These aftercare responsibilities were clearly very



limited, particularly as they excluded young people who spent a considerable amount of time in care but left shortly before they were 16.

The Review of Child Care Law in Scotland published in 1994 recommended strengthening these aftercare responsibilities. They proposed that local authorities be placed under a duty to prepare children for leaving care, whether this be a return to the family home or a move towards independent living. They also proposed that local authorities should be obliged to provide advice and assistance until age 21 to any young person who has spent a significant part of their life in care since the age of 12. A further recommendation was that authorities be required to establish a range of services to offer young people who have been in care.

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 introduced significant amendments to social work care of children. The terminology was changed so that instead of being 'in care' children are 'looked after' and/or 'accommodated' by the local authority. The duty of social work authorities to provide 'accommodation' for certain children contained in the new Act replaces voluntary care under the 1968 Act. Also, local authorities now have a power to provide accommodation for any child under 18 in their area whose welfare would be promoted by it, and to accommodate any young person in their area between 18 and 21. The compulsory supervision provisions remain similar, but emergency protection for children has been altered with the replacement of 'Place of Safety Orders' with 'Child Protection Orders'. Children who are being provided with accommodation, subject to a supervision requirement, or are under a Child Protection Order will now all be considered as 'looked after' by the local authority. The legislation also permits short-term refuges to be established for children who feel themselves to be at risk .

The legislation also imposes new aftercare duties on local authorities. There is a general duty to help children to prepare to leave care as well as specific aftercare responsibilities. Local authorities now have a duty to advise, guide and assist any child under 19 whom they 'looked after' at any time after they ceased to be of school age. The effect of this provision is to extend the duty to help care-leavers



from age 18 to 19. However those who come out of care shortly before 16 are still excluded from automatic entitlement to aftercare support. Local authorities also now have powers to provide similar assistance to 19 and 20 year olds. They are also empowered to provide grants for education or training, and to make contributions to accommodation and maintenance, for young people over 16 and under 21 who were 'looked after' by the local authority. Thus local authorities have discretion over whether to grant this financial assistance, but it can continue until the young person completes their education or training, even where they are over 21. The general S12 power to offer assistance in cash or in kind remains in relation to over 18s. As regards under 18s, there is now a duty to provide services to children 'in need', and this includes care-leavers.

The key points here are that the aftercare provisions in the new legislation are more extensive than previously, but more limited than the Review recommended (Cleland, 1995). Also, local authorities now have a power to provide accommodation for any person in their area up to age 21. Shelter (Scotland) have been publicising this latter provision as potentially very important to the young homeless.

### Young People's Experience of Social Work Services

There is a well established association between admission into social work care and disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances (Triseliotis *et al*, 1995). There have been large reductions in the numbers of children in residential units since the 1970s, and there has been a particular shift away from using children's homes for children under 12. Scottish Office figures published in 1992 showed that about 85 per cent of children in residential establishments were aged 12-17, and 14 and 15 year olds were especially likely to be admitted (Triseliotis *et al*, 1995). Caskie (1992) reported that the policy emphasis for social work authorities throughout Scotland is now to develop appropriate services to prevent children being taken into care, and to place children with foster parents wherever possible rather than in residential institutions.

Triseliotis *et al* conducted a longitudinal study of social work intervention with teenagers in England and Scotland. They found that social workers became

involved with teenagers and their families for three main reasons: conflict between the teenager and parents or stepparent; school related problems; and offending and/or drug, alcohol or solvent abuse. The majority of teenagers were positive about social work intervention, but fewer thought that it had had a major impact on their lives. Young people appeared to relate well to adults who had an informal approach; were frank but not 'nagging'; were available, punctual and reliable; and did practical things to help.

Young people, their parents and social workers considered the majority of placements in children's homes to have been beneficial. However young people often faced secondary problems arising from the experience of being in residential care, such as stigma and institutionalisation. Foster placements broke down more frequently than ones in residential establishments, but the foster placements which were successful worked extremely well and sometimes provided young people with a family base for adulthood.

All the agencies involved had developed programmes to help young people progress from care to adulthood, but young people living independently still faced great difficulties. Several said that they were pushed out of care before they were ready, particularly in Scotland. Others had been anxious to leave care as soon as possible but found life on their own difficult - both emotionally and practically. Most young care-leavers felt unsupported and abandoned by their social workers, although a few were able to rely upon them heavily. Support from former residential carers was usually minimal. Triseliotis *et al* (p.283) recommended that:

'Young people who are vulnerable should be able to stay in care longer, have more support when they leave and be able to return where necessary.'

Other studies on care-leavers have revealed similar bad experiences. For example, West (1995) found that most of his sample of care-leavers had serious housing and income problems and the majority were unemployed. Forty per cent of the young people interviewed said that they received no support after leaving care. They generally felt that support should last for 'as long as necessary' and for at least



five years after leaving care. Almost two-thirds of the sample said that they had some preparation for leaving care, usually practical living skills, but most felt that they lacked budgeting skills. Around a third felt that they were not mature enough nor ready to leave care when they did.

These difficulties facing care-leavers have prompted some social work authorities to revise their policies. For example, Strathclyde Regional Council had, before its demise, adopted a 'Through Care Strategy' and had appointed specialist workers in each district to develop the service and provide direct support to care-leavers.

### Social Work Services and Young Homeless People

Shelter (Scotland) investigated the links between social work care and youth homelessness (Caskie, 1992). They found that more than 40 per cent of young homeless people had experienced residential care, a figure consistent with a more recent survey of young homeless people (SCSH and Shelter (Scotland), 1994). Given that fewer than 1 per cent of Scottish children are in residential care, this indicates that young people with care backgrounds are very disproportionately represented amongst the young homeless population. However Caskie makes the point that not all of these young people were in residential care at the time of their 16th birthday and therefore 'care-leavers'. For example, a survey of homeless young Scots in London found that 44 per cent had been in residential care at some stage in their lives, but only 19 per cent were in care when they left school (Shelter (Scotland), 1991).

Caskie's report focuses on care-leavers. She argues that they are particularly vulnerable to homelessness for three main reasons. First, young people generally leave care at a much earlier age than young people leave the family home. Second, many young people with a history of care do not have the benefit of family support to help them make a successful transition to independent living. Third, care-leavers may be particularly ill-equipped to deal with independent living if they have lived in an institutional setting for a prolonged period.

She found that most local authorities had established a programme for preparing care-leavers for independent living, usually dealing with practical matters such as



health, budgeting, cooking and cleaning. However strategies for coping with the isolation and poverty which care-leavers often suffer were less well developed. It was fairly common for social work authorities to provide some financial help to care-leavers under the 1968 Act, but the practice was variable. Very few young people were released from the care system directly into homelessness. Homelessness usually occurred when the accommodation arrangements made by social work subsequently broke down. Many care-leavers moved back home at the age of 16, or shortly before, but the family problems that led to them being taken into care were often not resolved and they were ejected or left the family home. Other care-leavers moved into independent tenancies or 'supported accommodation' arrangements with the assistance of social work authorities. When these situations broke down the role of social workers was often unclear.

Bannister *et al*'s (1993) study included, but was not confined to, young homeless people who had experienced social work intervention as children. It concluded that there was confusion amongst social work professionals about their responsibilities in relation to the young homeless, and this stemmed in part from the vagueness of statutory duties towards this group. The research demonstrated the arbitrariness of decision-making by social workers on whether, for example, a young person would be allocated as a 'case'. An analysis of 'live' cases found that young people whose cases were managed by specialist homeless teams tended to receive a more appropriate intervention than those who were in contact with area teams. But these differences were rooted in resource inequalities as young homeless people had to compete with other client groups for social workers' time in area teams. Bannister *et al* found that relations between young homeless people and social workers were often poor. This was because many of the young homeless distrusted social workers, and in their turn social workers often viewed young homeless people as a difficult client group.

To summarise, social work agencies have an important role to play in responding to youth homelessness, but the precise nature of their responsibilities is unclear and varies between groups of young homeless people. Young people leaving care seek support which seems to resemble what the 'ordinary' family provides for its children as they leave home. Many of them do not get it.

### *The Social Security System*

One of the most important aspects of the response of statutory agencies to young homeless people is provision of cash benefits. The key organisation here is the Benefits Agency, which provides IS (and now JSA) and 'severe hardship' payments, Social Fund payments and Child Benefit. The framework of benefits available to young people was summarised in Chapter 1.2 and is explained in more detail here.

Young people's rights to social security benefits were gradually eroded throughout the 1980s, but the major changes were implemented by the Social Security Act 1986 which came into effect in 1988. The householder/non-householder distinction was abolished and instead an age differential was introduced into benefit rates. Unemployed people aged 18-24 were paid lower rates of IS than over 25s. The JSA was introduced in 1996 to replace UB and IS for claimants in the labour market, and 18-24 year olds who would previously have been able to claim UB lost money because an age differential was introduced into contributory JSA. Young workers under 25 who qualify for HB are disadvantaged because the threshold of earnings over which HB is withdrawn at a rate of 65 per cent is lower than for over 25s, in line with their lower IS (and JSA) entitlement.

Young people aged 16 and 17 years old were even more drastically affected by the 1988 amendments. They lost their entitlement to UB and can only claim IS under exceptional circumstances such as if they have a child or are disabled. Young people aged 16 and 17 who still manage to qualify for IS are paid benefits at a lower rate than 18-24 year olds. Under 18s are still eligible for HB but again the threshold for withdrawal is lower than for young people aged 18 and over. In the place of benefit entitlement, 16 and 17 year olds were 'guaranteed' an offer of a training place with an allowance of £29.50 in the first year rising to £35 a week in the second year. These allowances have not kept pace with inflation and contain no housing element, therefore it seems that trainees are presumed to live at home with their parents.



For unemployed 16 and 17 year olds who are not on a training scheme or in one of the statutory groups who retain entitlement to IS, the income maintenance provisions are patchy and complicated. Child Benefit was extended in 1988 so that the parents of unemployed young people can continue to claim for a period of 3-4 months after school leaving date so long as the young person is registered as available for work. Also, a Bridging Allowance of £15 a week was introduced for 16 and 17 year olds who are in between training placements or jobs. However this is only paid for a maximum of 8 weeks in a 52 week period and it may be stopped if a young person refuses any offer of a training place.

In the face of mounting criticism of these regulations the previous Government introduced 'severe hardship' payments for 16 and 17 year olds in 1989. The Secretary of State can direct that IS (now JSA) be paid to 16 and 17 year olds who are registered for work or training 'where severe hardship would be likely to result if it were withheld.' This is a discretionary payment rather than an automatic entitlement and there is no appeal if a young person is refused the benefit. It normally takes several weeks for this benefit to be delivered and it is paid only for a limited period after which the young person must re-apply and there is no guarantee that it will be continued. One reason young people's benefit may be discontinued is failure to attend the Careers Office regularly.

A Government-commissioned Mori survey in 1991 on the operation of the severe hardship provisions revealed many defects in the system (SPA, 1992). In particular, young people appeared to have difficulty in gaining accurate information about the benefit. Research by SPA (1992) found that many young people believed that they were only entitled to severe hardship payments if they were estranged and living away from their parents. In fact, payments can be made to young people living with their parents provided that their parents cannot support them financially, and receipt of benefit by parents is 'one indication that the parents cannot afford to support the child' (SPA, 1992, p.6).

The other major social security change in 1988 was the introduction of the Social Fund to replace the exceptional needs payments system for meeting large expenses for those on low incomes. Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants



available from the Social Fund are discretionary payments and budget limited so young people have to establish that they are a high priority to secure an award. Crisis Loans are available to people who cannot meet their immediate short term needs in an emergency. They are repayable, usually by deductions from future benefit. 16 and 17 year olds can apply for Crisis Loans because applicants do not have to be in receipt of IS (or JSA). Community Care Grants are non-repayable grants but are generally only available to those trying to re-establish themselves in the community after a period in institutional care. Also, applicants have to be in receipt of IS (or JSA) so most 16 and 17 year olds are ineligible.

It should be noted that most housing costs, such as deposits, are excluded from the Social Fund, and although rent in advance may be awarded it does not constitute a high priority. It thus became much more difficult after 1988 for unemployed young people or those on low income to set up home in the private sector, or in the unfurnished public sector because often they could not gain help to buy furniture or equipment.

More recent changes to HB have further undermined young people's position. In 1996 the eligible rent of private sector tenants for HB purposes was restricted to the 'local reference rent' plus 50 per cent of any excess up to the 'property specific rent' (reasonable rent assessed for that particular property). The rent officer determines the local reference rent as 'the mid-point of a range of rents for similar accommodation in the locality' (Bevan *et al*, 1995, p.5). Thus if a private tenant's landlord is charging more than this local reference rent they face the choice of trying to find somewhere cheaper to live or meeting the extra cost themselves. Even harsher treatment was reserved for single people under 25 living in the private rented sector whose eligible rent is now limited to the average local rent for shared accommodation in the locality.

To summarise, the state safety net for young people has therefore been seriously eroded in recent years, particularly for 16 and 17 year olds. Youthaid estimated in 1994 that 122,500 16 and 17 year olds had no job or training place and three quarters of these were without any income at all (Holman, 1994).

## **The Voluntary and Private Sectors**

Many of the services available to young homeless people are supplied by the 'voluntary' sector. This is because young homeless people often fall outwith the direct remit of statutory agencies, so voluntary agencies attempt to plug the gap (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). Some voluntary agencies rely solely on public donations, but many receive some form of government funding. These agencies are described as 'voluntary' but their staff are mainly employees, rather than volunteers, and their pay and qualifications often resemble those of the statutory sector.

These agencies range from traditional charities catering for older homeless groups, such as the Salvation Army, to new organisations set up from the 1970s onwards to specifically cater for young homeless people, such as Centrepont Soho in London. These agencies often provide advice, counselling and outreach services, and some have a campaigning role. However the major voluntary sector activity has been hostel provision (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). There has been an attempt over the last few years to shift away from traditional, large-scale hostels, to the establishment of higher quality, smaller hostels. There has been a particular concern to prevent young homeless people being placed in adult hostels and 'youth residential projects' have been set up as an alternative since the 1970s. These are described in the next section. However many traditional hostels still exist in both the voluntary and local authority sectors, particularly in Glasgow, and some young homeless people still use these hostels because they have nowhere else to go.

The very poorest quality of provision for homeless people is generally to be found in the commercial sector in bed and breakfast establishments and cheap hotels. Some young people are still placed in the private homelessness sector, often in appalling conditions.

## **Accommodation and Support Options**

Below are listed the principal housing and support options currently being offered or proposed for young people who are homeless or vulnerable to homelessness. There are other types of initiative, such as self-build schemes, which are not



mentioned here because they are less significant and I do not evaluate them in the thesis.

### *Self-contained Mainstream Accommodation*

This category is self explanatory. Some local authorities, including Glasgow City Council, allow young homeless people access to mainstream rented housing. Some young homeless people may also gain access to the private rented sector, but this is less common in Scotland, and especially in Glasgow, than in England.

### *Shared Housing*

These are arrangements whereby young people share accommodation with their peers. The accommodation may be provided by local authorities, housing associations or other voluntary agencies, and may or may not involve adult supervision and support. Some schemes accommodate only young homeless people, and others mix young vulnerable people with ‘ordinary’ young people such as students (Donnison, 1991).

### *Youth Residential Projects*

These tend to be small-scale projects, typically accommodating 10 to 20 young people. They normally only accept young people under 25, and many focus particularly on 16 and 17 year olds. Support and independence training is usually offered in these hostels. Most are managed by housing associations or other voluntary sector bodies, and some are run by social work departments (Caskie, 1990). Most of these schemes receive some form of assistance from the local authority housing departments, such as funding or provision of buildings.

### *Foyers*

The idea of ‘foyers’ is based on an existing French network of hostels for young workers which was established in the late 1940s and early 1950s to mobilise labour in the post-war period. The foyer concept was introduced into Britain by Shelter and the Grand Metropolitan Trust, who established a Foyer Federation for Youth in 1992 to promote their development. The Foyer Federation for Youth

(1993, p.3) has defined foyers as: ‘a form of transitional accommodation for young people linked to training/employment and social support.’ Anderson and Quilgars (1995a, p.2) have commented that foyers in Britain have become ‘closely associated with the provision of employment and training services within a hostel environment.’ Existing foyers are lightly supported and relatively large (accommodating from about 30 young people up to 120) (SCSH, 1994).

Foyers have gained a remarkably high profile in a very short space of time, particularly in England, and have received cross-party political support (Foyer Federation for Youth, 1996). There are a large number of foyer projects currently in operation in England, however their development has been much slower in Scotland and so far there are no foyers in Glasgow.

#### *Furnished Scatter Flats and the ‘Youth Housing Strategy’ in Glasgow*

In June 1991 Glasgow City Council adopted a ‘Youth Housing Strategy’ (YHS) as (McInulty and Brooks, 1992, p.1):

‘a response to the growing problem of homelessness amongst young people in the City and the need to find mechanisms to facilitate the transition to independent living.’

The main thrust of the programme is the development of furnished and supported scatter flats for young single people integrated into neighbourhoods throughout the city. Direct access emergency accommodation and planned entry hostels are also provided.

#### **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a summary of the current network of responses to youth homelessness which forms an important part of the context for this study. My own data on young people’s experiences of statutory and voluntary services is presented in Chapter 3.2, and the housing and support initiatives described above are evaluated in Chapter 4.3.



## **CHAPTER 1.4: HOW THE RESEARCH WAS DONE**

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes how the research was carried out. I begin by summarising the methods adopted and explain why they were chosen. An account is then given of each stage of the fieldwork process, including how the sample of young people was selected. There is a particular focus on the ‘tracking’ methods used to trace young homeless people’s progress, as these may be of interest to other researchers. The discussion then switches to the analysis of the data collected. The chapter concludes with a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of the methods I used. Before I begin discussing my research methods, however, the debate between ‘grounded theory’ and ‘hypotheses-testing’ approaches in social science research merits a brief mention.

### **Theories of Social Research**

The hypothetical-deductive model is within the ‘positivistic’ tradition of social science which emphasises ‘unity of method’ with the natural sciences. This approach advocates the logical deduction of hypotheses from general theories, and then the testing of these hypotheses through observations in empirical research (Popper, 1961). At the other end of the spectrum is ‘grounded theory’ based on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) who argued that hypotheses about the social world should be generated inductively from empirical data, rather than being constructed at a theoretical level prior to the fieldwork being conducted. The emphasis in this latter approach is upon viewing the world through the eyes of the researched as far as is possible.

In my view, the pure form of ‘grounded theory’ has little to commend it because this rather unfocussed approach to research seems likely to be less productive than the more traditional hypotheses-testing approach. Also, ideas of grounded theory are naive if taken too literally as they imply that researchers can have completely open minds free of pre-conceptions, and that theory will simply ‘emerge’ from data rather than being actively constructed by the researcher. On the other hand, the hypotheses-testing model advocated by Popper (1961) can lead to research being overly constrained by a pre-conceived theoretical framework, whereby all

material which does not neatly fit within *a priori* categories of the researcher is dismissed.

Qualitative methods, such as those I have adopted in this research, are often exploratory in nature and have thus been associated with generation of theory. However, qualitative research can also usefully be employed to test hypotheses (Bryman, 1988), although the generalisability of the results is likely to be problematic.

I attempted to adopt a sensible middle ground between these schools of thought by developing hypotheses to structure my investigations, but keeping an open mind about new topics and perceptions which emerged during the course of the fieldwork. However, the centrepiece of my thesis, the 'homelessness pathways' (see Chapter 2.2), may be described as 'grounded theory' because these categories were generated inductively from the data rather than being based on hypotheses. This was out of necessity because there had been little consideration given in previous literature to the existence of distinct subgroups within the young homeless population, and therefore I had no material with which to construct hypotheses. Thus my research was, in this respect, more concerned with hypotheses-generating than hypotheses-testing. On the other hand, in the thematic chapters of the thesis I more often sought to add my evidence to an existing body of knowledge. One element of my conceptual approach (see Chapter 1.2) which is often associated with 'grounded theory' is giving pre-eminence to the subjects' perceptions of their experiences, and using their words to convey ideas as far as possible.

### **Summary of Methods**

The thesis sought to illuminate the processes involved in youth homelessness and to investigate distinctions between young homeless people. Qualitative research methods were therefore more appropriate than quantitative because they allow a deeper analysis of experiences, perceptions and the subtleties of social processes. Intensive methods of study are particularly appropriate to a Ph.D. student who has the time and exclusivity required to make a sustained study, but lacks the resources to carry out extensive survey work.



As explained in Chapter 1.2, I was interested in relating homelessness to a local context. I therefore selected a housing estate in Glasgow called Drumchapel as the main location for the research (described in Chapter 1.5). As the aim of the study was to represent as wide a range of homelessness experiences as possible, including those which were 'hidden', I wished to contact a broad range of young people initially, before focusing on those who were homeless. To explore distinctions between groups of young homeless people in a dynamic way it was necessary to collect detailed information on their long-term histories. However, it was also important to trace their future progress in order to test whether categorisations developed in the research were sustained in the longer-term, and to find out if, and how, young people managed to move out of homelessness.

The methods were devised with these objectives in mind. There were three stages of empirical research:

1. The initial stage involved 8 group discussions with young people in Drumchapel.
2. The main stage of data collection consisted of 25 biographical interviews with young homeless people aged 16 to 19 years old, most of whom lived in, or originated from, Drumchapel.
3. The final phase of the fieldwork was a follow up exercise to 'track' these 25 young people.

Altogether, 53 young people participated in the research. An account of each stage of the empirical research is now given.

### **Stage 1: The Group Interviews**

#### *Objectives*

There were a range of objectives for this stage in the research. The first, and most important, objective was to develop research hypotheses for testing at the principal stage of fieldwork, and to sensitise myself to the issues which were most important to young people. Second, the interviews were intended to provide

contextual information on the lives of young people in Drumchapel. Third, I hoped to recruit young people from the group discussions to participate in the biographical interviews. Fourth, this initial stage of fieldwork enabled me to pilot questions and approaches before embarking on the main data collection exercise.

### *Sample*

My target group for these group discussions was single people aged between 16 and 25 living in Drumchapel. Altogether, I conducted 8 group interviews involving 40 young people: 24 young men and 16 young women. Most of those who participated in these groups were between 16 and 19 years olds, but a few young people who came along were in their early 20s, and 2 young men contacted through the local school were 15 years old. Also, a small number of young women who had had children or were pregnant participated in the focus groups.

I deliberately did not ask agencies to refer only those young people who they knew, or suspected, to have experienced homelessness. This was because I wished to gain access to youngsters who had not made their homelessness known to any helping agencies.

These participants were contacted through a wide range of agencies working with young people in Drumchapel (described in detail in Chapter 1.5). Gaining access to young people was more straightforward with some organisations than others, and lengthy negotiations were conducted with the social work department, the local school and the Detached Youth Work project. The Detached Youth Work project refused to become involved in the research unless the young interviewees were paid, and I managed to obtain Scottish Homes consent to give each participant in the group and biographical interviews £5 'expenses'. This incentive was actually quite crucial to the success of the project as a number of young people, particularly those in 'hidden' homeless situations, may not have got involved without this very modest reward.

### *Approach and Interview Schedules*

The approach taken was semi-structured group interviews. I attempted to organise the interviews around themes I was interested in, but allowed young people to



introduce other issues they felt were important. I found that Hedges (1985) offered very helpful practical advice on the conduct of group discussions.

With the exception of the group discussions in the school, all the interview schedules adhered to the basic format presented in Appendix 1. They addressed the following issues: work, training and benefits; leaving and returning home; homelessness; family and friendship networks; experience of public services; views on Drumchapel; priorities and plans for the future; housing preferences and meaning of home; gender issues. However, the interview schedules were adjusted slightly over the course of the 8 discussions in the light of the experience I had gained, and there were small differences in emphasis depending on the circumstances of the particular group of young people.

The 2 group interviews I conducted in Drumchapel High School adopted a somewhat different format from the others because I had undertaken not to investigate these young people's personal situations and none of them had left home as yet. These interviews covered the same topics as the other group discussions, with the exception of work and personal relationships, but focused on perceptions and aspirations rather than experiences.

I tape-recorded all the interviews conducted in the course of the research. I did not take notes in the group or in the individual interviews, because I felt it was important to concentrate entirely on the conversation with the young people. However, I did write down my impressions immediately after interviews.

### *Were the Objectives Achieved?*

This stage in the fieldwork was invaluable in sensitising me to the priorities of young people, and clarifying my research hypotheses. Most importantly, I was able to develop my framework of 'homelessness pathways' using the accounts given in these group discussions, which I then tested more rigorously in the principal stage of data collection. The collective voice of young people in a group situation meant that their views were articulated very forcefully and clearly, and some issues were introduced which had not occurred to me or I had given insufficient weight to, for example, young people's fear of living near intravenous drug users. This helped me

redraw the parameters of my research interest in line with what they viewed as relevant.

The group interviews provided useful information on Drumchapel and on other issues relevant to the research. I found that group interviews were particularly good contexts for exploring young people's views and perceptions on general and/or political matters such as the causes of homelessness or unemployment, the problems in Drumchapel, gender issues, and so on. The group environment provided the required stimulation - with young people able to bounce ideas off one another and challenge each other's views - to enable them to articulate opinions on issues which they had not perhaps consciously thought through before. This substantive data is used throughout the thesis, but, given the particularly exploratory nature of this stage of the research, only where it is supported by other sources of information either in the biographical interviews or other studies.

As explained above, the young people who participated in the group discussions were not selected on the basis that they were homeless. However, it turned out that most of them had experienced homelessness and around half of the participants in the biographical interviews were recruited from the group interviews. There were several advantages to this method of recruitment. First, it was particularly helpful in contacting young people who were 'hidden' homeless. Second, I tended to build up a rapport more quickly in the biographical interviews with those young people who had participated in the group discussions and thus the data from these interviews was particularly rich. Third, it meant that I already had some information about these young people which I was able to examine in greater depth.

I occasionally quote young people from these group interviews who have not experienced homelessness. These are mainly young people from the school groups as virtually all of those in the other groups had been homeless. I have used this data because these young people have a very similar social background to my homeless sample, and thus their attitudes and perceptions were shaped by the same sort of environmental factors.



A final point is that this preliminary stage of the fieldwork was helpful in allowing me to build up my skills and confidence in interviewing young people before I embarked on the main stage of fieldwork.

### *Practice Issues*

I found that it was helpful to get each person to speak briefly at the beginning of interviews in order to break the ice. I asked them to give me their name and age, and then threw out a factual question which was easy to answer, such as whether they were working. I reserved general questions about perceptions and opinions till towards the end of the interview when the participants had 'warmed up'.

I experienced few problems in keeping the conversation flowing or focused on relevant matters in the group interviews. Instead, the most significant difficulty I faced was controlling dominant individuals and encouraging passive individuals to contribute. Also, young people have relatively short attention spans and one has to be aware of the limitations in holding their interest. There were several techniques I found which helped me handle these difficulties.

I found that small groups worked best, of around 5 or 6 young people. A larger group can intimidate quieter people, and this in turn may encourage a dominant individual to lead the discussion and also risks secondary conversations breaking out. I did my best to encourage quieter members of the group with eye contact, and by using a combination of questions thrown open to the group and some directed at individuals to draw them in. I also requested that people spoke one at a time, and emphasised that all contributions were valuable. I often intervened with dominant individuals, telling them that the points they made were interesting but that I wanted to hear other people's views on them. In the main these techniques worked well and none of the groups were ruined by dominant individuals, although some were much harder work than others.

I found that the more homogeneous a group in terms of age, gender and experiences the more easily the conversation flowed. Shared experiences and perspectives provided common ground from which discussions, and disagreements, could evolve. Interviews with pre-existing groups were particularly successful as I was able to

plug into the existing group dynamic almost immediately, and this saved the time where strangers 'size each other up'.

This homogeneity and familiarity in groups may not always be appropriate in research. In particular, there are clearly drawbacks with pre-existing groups which will continue after the research as some young people may be afraid to speak their minds. However, as I would interview young people in private in later stages of the research I was not particularly worried about this inhibition, and I felt the advantages of rapid feedback from this approach far outweighed the inherent disadvantages. These had to be one-off group interviews and it was crucial that I gained as much information as possible in a relatively short period because of the limitations in young people's attention spans. I found that the quality of discussion started to deteriorate after about an hour. The older and less vulnerable young people tended to be easier to handle and had longer attention spans than the others.

A point I would like to make in relation to gender is that in my mixed sex interviews young women were not systematically marginalised. Instead, I found whichever was the minority sex in terms of numbers present tended to be squeezed out by the more numerous sex. If anything, young men were often the quieter group because many of the teenage boys I met were shyer and less articulate than the young women.

It was important to secure the right venue for group interviews. Most importantly, it had to be somewhere convenient in the local area for young people to get to. It should be somewhere quiet, without distractions such as people walking in and out, and preferably a comfortable and familiar place to help put young people at their ease. Neutral venues were best, away from the family home and out of earshot of agency workers, so that young people could speak more freely. A fairly small room with a table to lean on and to place coffee cups seemed to create the appropriate intimate atmosphere. Some of the venues I used met these criteria better than others.

I did not find that young people were inhibited by the tape recorder, so long as they were reassured that nobody official, such as the Benefits Agency, would have access to the tapes. As far as I could make out, young people also seemed fairly unconstrained by my presence in these group interviews - the conversation was



rarely stilted and much of the time their comments were not even directed at me. I think the fact that I was (almost) in their age group, had a similar accent, and was not in any official capacity helped the young people to relax. I feel that these factors aided the quality of information I received both in the group and biographical interviews.

Young people by and large seemed to enjoy the group interview as an interesting and stimulating experience. No young person seemed upset by the experience, even though some personal and painful experiences were discussed, probably because the bulk of the discussion related to other young people's experiences or general topics.

## **Stage 2: The Biographical Interviews**

### *Objectives*

The principal purpose of this stage of the research was to test my central hypotheses on young people's pathways through homelessness, and to place these experiences of homelessness in the context of their lives as a whole. This main stage of fieldwork was also intended to provide the bulk of data on young homeless people's 'public' and 'private' lives and the other material required to answer my research questions.

### *Sample*

The target group for this stage of the fieldwork was single homeless people from Drumchapel aged 16-19 years old (inclusive). I conducted 39 biographical interviews in total and selected 25 of these to analyse fully. The sample of young people for the biographical interviews was clearly not selected in any statistically representative way, but they were carefully chosen to reflect the diversity of homelessness experiences identified in the group interviews. Out of this sample of 25 young people, 12 had participated in the group interviews. I selected 10 young women and 15 young men to allow me to compare the experiences of both genders.

All of these 25 were either currently homeless, or had recently been homeless, within the definition which I outline in Chapter 2.1. At the point when I conducted the biographical interviews these young people's accommodation circumstances were as follows:

- 4 were staying in adult hostels
- 7 were staying in young person's hostels
- 4 were staying in a supported housing complex in Drumchapel
- 2 were living in a furnished scatter flat in Drumchapel
- 1 was staying with parents
- 2 were staying with relatives or friends
- 2 were living in their own mainstream tenancy
- 2 were sleeping rough in their local area
- 1 was sleeping rough in the city centre

These housing circumstances were often very short-term, and most young people had passed through other forms of accommodation as part of their homelessness career; indeed it is these accommodation patterns with which my thesis is primarily concerned. It may be interesting to note here that 15 out of these 25 young people had slept rough at some point, 10 of them in their local area and 5 in the city centre.

I narrowed the age range to 16 to 19 years old because I felt that the small numbers involved meant that I couldn't adequately represent the varying experiences of as broad an age range as 16-25, both because of life-course and historical differences. My sample included 1 16 year old, 10 17 year olds, 7 18 year olds and 7 19 year olds.

I wished to interview both young people who were living in Drumchapel and young people who originated from Drumchapel but were living elsewhere in Glasgow, in order to reflect a broad range of homelessness experiences. To this end, I contacted young people through local agencies in Drumchapel and through the city-wide network of homelessness services.



I found I could not adequately represent routes through homelessness which involved the city-wide network of hostels using only a Drumchapel sample. Therefore 5 of the 25 young people I interviewed came from other similar areas in Glasgow, including Castlemilk, Ruchazie, Craigend and Darnley, and 1 young person came from Johnston outside Glasgow. In total, therefore, 19 out of the 25 came from Drumchapel.

### *Approach and Interview Schedules*

The biographical interviews were also semi-structured, whereby I had a set of topics I hoped to cover with young people, but I allowed them to shape the direction the interview took.

It was necessary to examine each sphere of a young person's life separately in the interview, for example their employment or accommodation career, rather than ask them to provide a chronological and multi-dimensional biography. This meant that it was necessary to subsequently piece each of these strands together into an integrated biography. I shall discuss what this involved under the analysis section.

Appendix 2 presents the topic guide I used in the biographical interviews. It covers many of the same issues as the group interviews, but is more focused on biographical details and individual circumstances, as well as personal aspirations and perceptions. The main topics were: childhood experiences; employment and training; income and benefits; leaving home/care; accommodation history; experience of homelessness and rooflessness; personal relationships and social support; perceptions of homelessness, gender, adulthood and Drumchapel; housing preferences and support needs; plans and priorities for the future.

### *Were the Objectives Achieved?*

The biographical interviews were generally very successful. I was able to test and refine my hypotheses on young people's pathways through homelessness by tracing these experiences in detail, and to place these in the context of their long-

term histories. It was essential to conduct individual interviews in order to have the time and privacy required to gather the personal details needed to address my research questions, and to allow young people to express opinions without peer pressure. They were also more successful than the group interviews in exploring very personal concepts, such as the meaning of home and adulthood, but were less successful than the focus groups with broader political themes like gender or the causes of homelessness and unemployment.

### *Practice Issues in Biographical Interviews*

Like the group interviews, it was important that the location for the interview was appropriate and young people felt comfortable. In particular, I tried to ensure that they were not within earshot of other people when they told their story. Thus I carried out interviews in a variety of locations, such as private interview rooms in agencies or in young people's own flats, but *not* in their parents' home or in the main office of hostels or advice agencies.

I found that young people were often somewhat wary and stilted at the beginning of the biographical interview, and opened up as the discussion went on. They occasionally contradicted themselves when the same issue arose at different points in the interview, and I had to use my judgement about what was the most accurate account. I normally accepted the later version because of the rapport I had usually built with young people by then.

It seems likely that repeat interviews would be an even more effective way of gathering this type of information than one-off biographical interviews, and these should be pursued where resources allow. This is for two reasons. First, the biographical interviews had to cover a lot of ground in a fairly short period, one to two hours mainly, and this left both of us exhausted and we could not always pursue issues in as much depth as I would have liked. Second, a greater level of trust could be built up over a period leading to franker discussions. That said, I should emphasise that young people did, as interviews progressed, open up to me.

The biographical interviews were far more emotionally draining than the group interviews for both myself and the young person because of the emphasis on their



personal, and often harrowing, experiences. It would have been helpful for me to have had more support and training on how to withdraw from such an interview and to handle the emotional aftermath. In saying that, I am not aware of having caused distress to any of my young interviewees.

### **Stage 3: The Follow-Up Study**

#### *Objectives*

The third stage of fieldwork was a follow-up study of these 25 young homeless people one year after the main fieldwork had been completed. I had obtained permission to conduct this follow-up from all of these young people. The aims of this stage of the research were first, to monitor young homeless people's progress, and second, to test methods for 'tracking' homeless people.

#### *Approach: Maximum and Minimum Information*

Most studies of youth homelessness have relied on historical accounts of young people's experiences. However, there are one or two exceptions and the most recent youth homelessness research I am aware of which contained a 'longitudinal' element was the study by Stockley *et al* (1993) of young people 'at risk of homelessness' in the south of England. They tracked the progress of 72 young people over the period of a year as a follow-up to a larger questionnaire survey.

I used some of the techniques of Stockley *et al* in my follow-up study. In particular, I employed their concepts of 'maximum' and 'minimum' information, which they based on research by Smith and Gilford (1991). They used the term 'maximum' to describe first-hand information they received from young people during the follow-up period from interviews or questionnaires. 'Minimum' information was second-hand data on key elements of their progress, such as what kind of accommodation they were living in and their employment situation, obtained from agencies or from informal networking.

The method of tracking I adopted was 're-discovery' of young people after a period of a year rather than continual tracking. At the time of the biographical

interviews I had obtained from them their address and/or phone number, and the name and address of an agency and/or a relative or friend who I could contact them through. I also asked their permission to do more informal tracking through their friendship networks. All young people were able to give me at least one follow-up 'lead', and most gave me several.

Ideally, I wanted to re-interview young people, failing that I sent them a questionnaire. The interview schedule I used at this stage is presented in Appendix 3 and the questionnaire in Appendix 4. I managed to re-interview 9 young people and received questionnaire responses from another 2. I obtained minimum information about another 11 young people: for 7 of whom I gained quite substantial second-hand data, and another 4 where the information I received was very limited. This information is clearly less reliable than evidence from the young people themselves, but where possible I sought corroboration from more than one source about the young person's progress. There were only 3 young people for whom I gained no follow-up information at all, and these were all young women. I generally gained more information on young people living in Drumchapel than young people I had contacted through the city-wide networks.

There were no young people whom I managed to contact who actually refused to be re-interviewed, but there were a number I attempted to arrange interviews with who did not turn up or did not contact me to arrange a meeting where that was necessary. I suspect apathy rather than an active desire not to be interviewed lay behind this.

### *Were the Objectives Achieved?*

It was successful in relation to the first objective, of yielding interesting and illuminating information about the progress of young homeless people. In fact, this follow-up stage is one of the key features of the research which marks it out from most other studies of youth homelessness by giving it a prospective, longitudinal dimension. This material was vital in testing the validity of the 'pathways' through homelessness which I developed using the historical material gathered in the principal phase of the fieldwork.



However, the research was less successful in testing and developing techniques for 'tracking' homeless people because it would be difficult for most other researchers to replicate the methods I used. As I noted above, I was able to find out some information on the progress of almost all the young people I interviewed, but my success was attributable mainly to the intensive methods adopted in this research. I spent a whole summer in Drumchapel so I was able to build up good networks with young people and agency workers there who were able to assist me in re-contacting my sample. In a larger scale study where researchers could not spend as much time building up relationships in a particular community, it would be much more difficult to trace young homeless people after a period of time. It was notable that I had far less success tracing young people whom I had contacted through the city-wide network than those in Drumchapel. Even with these advantages, I found tracking young people a very labour-intensive and uncertain task.

### *Practice Issues in the Tracking Exercise*

This was much more difficult than the other stages of fieldwork because I had to contact specific young people, rather than just identify a sample who met certain criteria. It was also very time-consuming to locate the young people because they were now scattered across a range of living situations rather than concentrated in particular places or in contact with specific agencies. I also had to spend time re-negotiating access to agency assistance.

I noted the following practice points about tracking young homeless people, some of which are also mentioned by Cohen *et al* (1993) in their article on follow-up methods in homelessness research in the US:

- It was a considerable advantage that the young people who I was tracking already knew me, as this seemed to encourage them to respond to my requests for follow-up information. Therefore studies of homeless people which involve a tracking element should, wherever possible, ensure that the researcher who first interviews a homeless person also follows them up.

- It is best to get as many contact points as possible for young people, particularly close relatives and professionals with whom they are likely to have continuing contact, such as their social worker. Less helpful are agencies they tend to be in contact with for only a set period, such as hostels. Wherever possible, telephone numbers should be obtained as well as names and addresses as many people are ex-directory, and a telephone call is more likely to produce a result than written correspondence. On the other hand, phone calls are more intrusive than letters and phoning a young person's parents, for example, may be sensitive. Of course, few of these young people had telephones in their own homes and many of their contacts also did not have telephones.
- Using agency contacts can be problematic because of their concerns about confidentiality and staff time being used to assist researchers. Also, the follow-on addresses they have will often be out of date. However, it is best to arrange follow-up interviews through helping agencies first, before embarking on the more difficult, and potentially sensitive, road of pursuing private addresses and phone numbers.
- It is advisable to get agencies on board from the outset in relation to the tracking exercise so that they expect the researcher to return and (hopefully) will be more willing to assist. It is best to attempt to persuade agencies to co-operate as a network so that they will alert the researcher if they come into contact with any of the sample of young people, rather than simply the research participants contacted through them. It is advisable to minimise the work the agencies have to do in order to encourage their participation, but where they are willing to arrange interviews it is easier than the researchers setting them up themselves.
- It is sensible to gain as much 'minimum' information about young people as possible from every available source in case 'maximum' information cannot be obtained.



- It may be helpful to get young people to sign an agreement to say that they are willing to be tracked. This may help persuade agencies to co-operate although they will often want to check with the young person again to make sure they are still agreeable.
- It was most effective to get agencies to give me young people's addresses or a means of contacting them, rather than relying on the young people to take the initiative in arranging a meeting. However, I should add that several young people in my sample did arrange to meet me, but I think this was because they already knew me and I doubt that they would have bothered had it been a stranger they were asked to contact.
- I felt that it was only appropriate to go to a young person's house after writing to them and giving them the opportunity of letting me know that they did not want me to visit - although it must be added that none did reply negatively. I only visited them at home if they themselves had given me the address or the agency had specifically received their consent for me to approach them there. It is particularly important to be sensitive here if they are living with their family or a partner. However, it is very difficult to avoid awkward situations altogether as young people may have changed their mind about being approached at their home. One must be prepared to withdraw tactfully.

### **Analysis of Data**

Qualitative data is by its very nature 'voluminous, unstructured and unwieldy' and thus researchers often consider analysis of this material problematic (Bryman and Burgess, 1996, p.216). To find structure and meaning in a diversity of personal experiences is a very creative task which requires the use of both intuition and logic (Ritchie and Spencer, 1996). It is also, as has been noted by Jones (1985, p.56), 'a highly personal activity' which is difficult to make explicit to an audience. However, it is important that the analytical process is made as transparent as possible to enable the validity of the research to be assessed. I shall therefore explain as best I can the approach I took in analysing this data,

concentrating upon the biographical interviews because this was the most complex and important piece of analysis.

There are two distinct elements to the analytical process. First, there is the preparation of data for analysis by organising it into a manageable format and coding it into categories. This is sometimes called 'data handling'. Second, 'interpretation' is the 'thinking' part of analysis, the mental process whereby we draw inferences and attach meaning to the data. In reality, researchers tend to move back and forth between data handling and interpretation, but this distinction is a helpful explanatory aid.

### *Transcription and Manipulation*

The first task was to prepare and organise the data for coding and interpretation. All of the group and biographical interviews were tape-recorded and so required to be transcribed for use. I typed notes from the tapes, rather than full transcripts, but these included a great deal of direct quotations and dialogue. Thus the analysis really begun at this stage as I sifted through the tapes for what I considered to be relevant.

The preparation of the group interviews was relatively straightforward. I wrote a report on each of the discussions by typing up the interesting material and quotes, and re-arranged the data under a series of thematic headings. These headings were based upon the *a priori* themes contained in the interview schedule, but they did evolve as the analysis proceeded and new themes or significant sub-categories emerged, and less significant themes were abandoned or subsumed in broader categories. Some informal analysis of the group interviews was carried out before the second stage of fieldwork, as it was intended to feed into and create hypotheses for the biographical interviews, but the systematic analysis occurred once all the fieldwork (bar the follow-up) had been completed.

Preparing the biographical interviews for interpretation was far more challenging because I had to piece together young people's life stories from information they had given me across various spheres of their lives. As explained above, I had explored their various 'careers' separately, but had cross-referenced dates and



circumstances as much as possible to facilitate the construction of an integrated biography. This was nevertheless a difficult task because of the imprecise and incomplete nature of some of the information and the complexity of some young people's lives. I prepared a case report on each young person by organising the basic factual material on their lives into a chronological record. I then arranged the more issue based material on attitudes, experiences and motivations into a series of thematic headings. At the end of each case report I wrote a short summary of my impressions about the young person, including my predictions about their progress, and some notes about the main points to arise in that case.

These edited case reports were quite time-consuming to produce, but were much easier to interpret than the far greater volume of unstructured material which would have been produced by full transcripts.

The preparation of the follow-up material was relatively straightforward as at that stage of fieldwork I simply collected a very limited amount of basic facts about a young person's situation and arranged these facts under subject headings.

### *Coding*

I completed the preparation of the group and biographical data by manually adding letter codes into the margins of a hard copy of each group and biographical case report. I labeled the data using 62 different codes; examples include 'P' to indicate relationship with parents, 'PhA' to indicate physical abuse, and 'CCR' to indicate experience of rooflessness in the city-centre. Some of these codes were identified during the fieldwork stage, and others emerged during the early phases of the analysis process and I had to go back and revise the scripts I had already coded. I felt that manual rather than computer aided coding was most appropriate as I had a manageable amount of data which was already partially coded by re-arranging it under headings.

### *Interpretation*

Then I began the much more intellectually demanding and creative stage of interpreting the data, although further elements of data manipulation were still required. The key task was to explore whether distinct pathways through

homelessness could be identified based on the experiences of these young people. I began by drawing a 'pathway' for each young person who participated in the biographical interviews on a large sheet of paper, plotting each of their key biographical events. I then condensed the main facts for each young person into a summary pathway and pieced all of these pathways together on one very large sheet of paper, or rather several sheets attached together, in order to view all of the pathways at once.

From these 25 pathways I attempted various ways of grouping young people according to their accommodation routes. I was seeking to find categories which had both 'internal homogeneity', that is meaningful similarities, and 'external heterogeneity', that is clear differences between categories. The basis for this analysis was drawn from the hypotheses generated by the group interviews, but they were considerably refined as I examined and re-examined the biographical data. There were several attempts to construct a typology of pathways before I devised the one presented in Chapter 2.2. During this process I had to continually move back and forth between the complexity of the real world and the simplification of the patterns I was seeking to clarify and explain. Once I had constructed this series of pathways through housing and homelessness, I examined the other personal details of young people to consider whether they were associated with certain experiences, attitudes and characteristics.

I then analysed the other issue based material for the thematic chapters. I checked through each data report from the group and biographical interviews, and used the codes and headings to locate all the material relevant to each topic. I then listed on large sheets of paper all the main points and key quotes on that topic to allow me to compare the content of each interview in relation to that category of interest (this was my version of the 'cut and paste' which is sometimes manually done with transcripts, or often now with computer packages). Using this aggregated material, I proceeded to probe for patterns of experiences, attitudes, motivations and so on, and to seek explanations for what I found.

Ironically, analysis of qualitative as well as quantitative data often seems to turn upon the notion of frequencies. Bryman and Burgess (1996) comment in the



conclusion of their edited volume on analysing qualitative data that it is still not clear from the accounts of their contributors what criteria is employed to determine which themes or ideas emerge as core elements in research reports. However they suggest that (p.224): 'The determining factor often seems to be the frequency with which something is observed or is said in interviews...' I believe that this should be made explicit in the reporting of qualitative research. Direct quotation is a key means of presenting qualitative data from interviews, but this should be contextualised in the light of the data on that topic as a whole. I therefore used formulations such as 'most', 'often', 'several', 'seldom', 'a few' to indicate patterns, as well as sometimes stating how many out of the 25 shared a particular attitude or experience. Placing value upon frequencies in qualitative analysis does not mean that unusual cases or exceptions are not worth reporting, for example extreme cases which indicate the boundaries of phenomenon are important. Neither does it mean that other factors are not relevant, for example intensity of feeling. However, how often one comes across a particular comment or set of experiences undoubtedly influences the significance one attaches to it.

The inherent subjectivity of this whole process of qualitative analysis cannot be denied. There were innumerable judgements to be made at every stage of the interpretation. For example, in resolving apparent contradictions in a young persons' account, in considering whether particular comments 'rang true', in deciding what young people 'really meant' by what they say, and so on. Whilst quantitative research analysis is also a subjective exercise, I agree with (Walker, 1985, p.3) that:

'Analysis of qualitative material is more explicitly interpretive, creative and personal than in quantitative analysis, which is not to say that it should not be equally systematic and careful.'

### *Summary*

It may be argued that I employed a fairly informal system of analysis. However, it was systematically and thoroughly executed whereby every source of data on each point was considered, and conclusions refined, or occasionally abandoned, in the light of inconsistent evidence. Despite the necessity of 'fracturing' the data into

compartments in order to manipulate and make sense of it, I was able to keep a sense of the ‘wholeness’ of each young homeless person because I had a complete case report on the biographical interviews.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Methods**

The main strength of the intense methods I adopted is the richness of the data obtained. I was also able to use the thesis as a vehicle to forcibly express young homeless people’s views in their own words, and to offer vivid and detailed portrayals of their experiences. The flexibility offered by qualitative techniques was also helpful in allowing me to take account of unexpected factors and perspectives. None of this would have been possible with the inevitably more superficial data generated by quantitative methods. As explained earlier, the group and biographical interviews had different, and complementary, strengths.

The key strength of qualitative research is generally considered to be its ‘validity’, that is, the extent to which it is a genuine reflection of reality, because it allows the researcher to get ‘close to the data.’ However, the validity of my findings may be contested because they are based on self-reporting and from the perspective of only one actor. In other words, are young people telling me the truth? I cannot be certain but a couple of factors do suggest that they largely did give me an accurate account, at least as they saw it. First, there was little pressure on young people to lie to me because I had no power over them. Although it may be the case that they sometimes told me what they thought I wanted to hear, I did my best to avoid influencing their answer using formulations such as ‘Would you like a job, or are you not really bothered?’ Second, in a few cases I received confirmation of a young person’s story because I interviewed more than one member of a family or an indiscreet agency worker discussed their case with me. It must be emphasised that the purpose of the research was to illuminate the perspective of this disenfranchised group, but that is not to say that other perspectives, such as those of their parents, are not also important.

As with all qualitative research, the principal weakness is the generalisability of the findings because of doubts over the representativeness of the sample selected. The small scale and located nature of the study, and the largely opportunistic sample



selection, does mean that the findings should be viewed primarily as a basis for formulating hypotheses which should be tested more widely in later research. However, there are several reasons why I consider that it may be possible to claim some wider significance for these results.

First, 53 young people were interviewed in the course of the research, most of whom had been homeless. Although not as large a number as would be contacted in a quantitative project it is still a significant number of respondents.

Second, Drumchapel was selected as the location for my research because it is very similar - socially, economically and culturally - to many other large housing schemes in Scotland (see Chapter 1.5). Moreover, the available statistics indicate that these areas yield very high levels of youth homelessness. It seems likely, therefore, that the experiences of young people from Drumchapel are a fair representation of the reality of youth homelessness in many parts of Scotland.

Third, while the sample were not selected on a random basis or any statistically representative way, the young people who participated in the biographical interviews were carefully chosen to represent as broad a range of homelessness experiences as possible - as suggested by previous literature and the group interviews. So in the sense of documenting the diversity of experience, I would suggest that this study is more representative than most homelessness research which focuses only upon particular dimensions, such as hostel-dwellers or rough sleepers in city centres.

The issue nevertheless remains of whether I can legitimately base policy and practice recommendations on a small-scale qualitative study. For these reasons I distinguish between those recommendations which are based solely on new findings from my research, offering these on a tentative basis, and those where my evidence adds to an already substantial body of knowledge.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the methods of data collection and analysis I adopted in this study, and highlighted the strengths and limitations of the evidence produced. The next chapter describes the location for the research.



## **CHAPTER 1.5: THE PLACE**

### **Introduction**

This chapter begins by describing Drumchapel: the public sector housing estate in Glasgow where most of the fieldwork was conducted. It then explains why this area was selected as the principal research location. The network of local services for young homeless people is then summarised; both in Glasgow as a whole, and in Drumchapel.

### **An Overview of Drumchapel**

Drumchapel is situated approximately 7 miles to the north-west of Glasgow city centre, and is one of four peripheral council housing schemes in the city. The area has long been characterised by high levels of unemployment, poverty and population decline, as have the other peripheral schemes. Indeed, as the Drumchapel Local Plan states (Glasgow City Council, 1992, p.4): ‘the peripheral estates collectively are seen as the major urban renewal problem of the city for the 1990s.’

Drumchapel was built in the 1950s and 60s, in parallel with the other peripheral schemes, to cope with the city’s post-war housing shortage. The housing was built rapidly and cheaply which resulted in ‘built in design faults, monotonous layouts and inadequate attention given to amenities, environmental quality and employment’ (Glasgow City Council, 1992, p.4). These problems were exacerbated in subsequent decades by the city’s economic decline and population loss. In 1971 the population of Drumchapel was 35,000, and employment was still relatively plentiful in the local heavy and manufacturing industries (Glasgow City Council, 1996a). With the decline of the traditional industries in the 1970s, the population fell to 27,000 by 1981. The population continued to decline in the 1980s, but this exodus was largely due to better-off tenants in work moving out to seek a better quality of housing and living environment. By 1994 the population had fallen to just under 18,000, and was projected to drop to 16,000 by the end of the decade (Glasgow City Council, 1992).

The overall impact of these population trends has been to increase the concentration of disadvantaged groups in Drumchapel. By 1996, male unemployment was three times the national average, and contained an exceptionally high proportion of long-term unemployed (45%) (Glasgow City Council, 1996b). The 1991 Census indicated that nearly 40 per cent of all households were economically inactive, excluding the retired, and the population of lone parent families was nearly three times the city average (19% of total households in Drumchapel as compared with 7% in Glasgow). Presently, over 75 per cent of tenants are in receipt of Housing Benefit (Glasgow City Council, 1996a). One striking indication of poverty revealed by the 1991 Census is that 83 per cent of households in Drumchapel have no car. These social problems have been compounded by the deteriorating condition of housing in the area, and the high rates of turnover and voids in the housing stock have further undermined the social fabric of the area.

Drumchapel is a young community with 45 per cent of its population under 25, as compared with 32 per cent in Glasgow as a whole (Glasgow City Council, 1996b). These children and young people are often at the sharp end of deprivation in the area. Recent estimates suggest that almost three-quarters of all children in Drumchapel live in families receiving IS or Family Credit (Glasgow City Council, 1996a). This disadvantage manifests itself in poor educational attainment, with young people from Drumchapel achieving just over 70 per cent of the city average in Standard Grade passes. Truancy and learning difficulties, particularly with reading, are major contributory factors. For example, the principal guidance teacher at Drumchapel High School told me that in 1993 truancy ran at 18 per cent amongst 1st year pupils, 25 per cent amongst 2nd years, and 31 per cent amongst 3rd years. These disadvantages carry on into young adulthood, with youth unemployment in 1996 running at 21 per cent (Glasgow City Council, 1996b). Substance abuse and offending rates cannot be precisely quantified, but are undoubtedly well above the city average.

These social problems have persisted despite a range of initiatives intended to regenerate the area. The Drumchapel Initiative was established in 1986 by Glasgow District Council and Strathclyde Regional Council to address its 'social,



economic and physical problems' (Glasgow City Council, 1996a, para.3.2). An economic development offshoot, Drumchapel Opportunities, was set up to tackle the problems of unemployment in the area. The local authority housing department has refurbished and replaced some of the worst housing stock in Drumchapel. Also, investment by Scottish Homes and private developers has brought about a tenure mix and physical improvements in some areas of the scheme. There has been significant private sector investment on the doorstep of Drumchapel in last couple of years through the Great Western Retail and Business Park. However, indicative of the continuing deprivation of the area is that Drumchapel has recently been successful in its bid for 'Priority Partnership Area' status in the latest Scottish Office urban regeneration programme.

### **Why Select Drumchapel As The Location for the Research?**

As explained in Chapter 1.2, I wanted to locate my research in a specific residential area in order to explore the nature of youth homelessness in local neighbourhoods. Locating the research in this way also helped to place the biographical data into as sharp a structural context as possible. For example, I could form a very clear picture of local housing and labour market conditions. I was also able to hold the personal social variables of class and race constant as Drumchapel is virtually all white and working class. This allowed me to focus the analysis on the impact of individual circumstances and motivations on the experience of homelessness, and on gender issues.

Drumchapel was selected as the primary location for my study for a number of reasons. First, statistics from emergency accommodation units in Glasgow city centre (described below) suggested that Drumchapel had one of the highest rates of youth homelessness in the city. Second, as mentioned above, Drumchapel is typical of many peripheral housing schemes in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland, therefore using it as the location for my research enhanced the generalisability of the findings. Third, there was a relatively well-developed network of youth services in Drumchapel which facilitated my access to young homeless people. This also meant that I would not be giving an 'unfair' or over-critical assessment of Glasgow's public services by drawing on the experiences of that area.

## **The Network of Services for Young Homeless People in Glasgow**

In this section I will provide an overview of services for young homeless people in Glasgow, and the following section will outline the network of youth agencies in Drumchapel. The purpose of this overview is not to provide an exhaustive list of all the available services, but rather to set the context within which the homelessness pathways described in Chapter 2.2 must be understood. Thus it is a selective account and the network is described as at the time when the fieldwork was conducted rather than as it is now, although some major developments in the intervening period are noted.

Glasgow has a relatively sophisticated network of homelessness services. I will present the network in three tiers:

- City centre emergency services for homeless young people
- The city-wide network of young persons hostels
- The network of adult homelessness services

### *City Centre Emergency Services for Young Homeless People*

There were two sources of emergency, direct access accommodation specifically for young homeless people in Glasgow city centre when I conducted the research: the Hamish Allen Centre (HAC) and Glasgow Stopover. In addition, there were two agencies which offered support and advice specifically to young homeless people: City Centre Initiative (CCI) and the Homeless Young Persons Team (HYPT).

- The HAC is Glasgow City Council's homeless reception centre which was opened in 1990. It provides 'one door' access to the council's homelessness services, and all single people requiring emergency accommodation from the local authority must be referred there. It provides emergency accommodation for 17 single young people aged 16 and 17 years old on the premises in bedsits, and there is now an extension of this emergency accommodation for under 18s in the James McLean project. Both of these projects offer 24 hour support. Young people may stay up to 4 weeks in these emergency units before being



moved on to longer-term accommodation. Young single homeless people aged over 18 will normally be given emergency accommodation in an adult hostel, although they may be moved onto longer-term accommodation in specialist youth projects. The HAC will only accommodate young people who are statutorily homeless and have a local connection with Glasgow. The HAC is generally acclaimed as an innovative and high-quality service for homeless people because of its role as a 'one stop' co-ordinating point for advice and assistance to homeless people, and the good physical standard of the accommodation provided on site (GCSH, 1993).

- Glasgow Stopover was one of a network of projects in Scottish towns and cities which provide direct access accommodation for young homeless people with 24 hour support. Glasgow Stopover could accommodate 14 young people aged between 16 and 21, but tended to prioritise 16 and 17 year olds as demand far outstripped supply. This accommodation was on a short-term basis, and young people could stay for up to 10 weeks. Glasgow Stopover operated independently of Glasgow City Council so there was no need for a Glasgow connection to gain access to this accommodation, and young people barred from local authority provision (usually because of their behaviour or non-payment of rent) could also be accepted. It was developed and managed by GCSH in partnership with West of Scotland Housing Association. It received revenue funding from Urban Aid and through Housing Benefit, and help with capital costs from Glasgow City Council. Glasgow Stopover closed in October 1993 after its Urban Aid funding ran out. It has since been replaced by a project run by Quarriers Homes on a similar basis.
- CCI was formed in 1991 to provide a drop-in and street work service for young people 'at risk' in the city centre aged 13-25 years. A major element of this work is providing support and practical assistance to young homeless people, including advocating on their behalf to other agencies such as the HAC. This is a multi-agency project involving the local authority social work and community education services, YMCA and Barnardos.

- HYPT is a social work team dedicated to working with 16 and 17 year olds who are roofless within the city centre or are accommodated in the young persons homelessness network. They only deal with young people who do not have a social worker from an area team.

### *The City-wide Network of Young Persons Accommodation*

There is a network of youth residential projects aimed at young homeless people under 25 in Glasgow. These are generally small-scale projects providing relatively high quality accommodation, at least in comparison to the adult network. Most are managed by housing associations or other voluntary sector bodies. However, many of these projects receive some form of assistance or a grant from the local housing authority, and some are 'registered' with the social work department and receive supplementation for residents referred by social work services. The local housing authority also provides some supported accommodation for young people in its own stock.

Most of these projects operate on a planned access and agency referral basis, but a few will consider emergency referrals. The supplemented hostels often require a 'live' social work connection; that is, the young person must currently have a social worker or be allocated one by the HYPT. A 'Glasgow connection' is sometimes necessary for admission to those projects with close links to the local housing authority.

Some form of support and independence training is usually offered in these hostels, but distinctions can be drawn between hostels which offer high, medium and low levels of support. For example, very intensive, therapeutic support is offered by two projects managed by the Catholic Archdiocese called Glengowan House and De Paul House. These projects are aimed at the most vulnerable and damaged young people, and the majority of residents stay for more than 18 months.

What I have termed a 'medium' level of support is offered by a wide variety of projects in Glasgow. In practice the actual level of support varies between projects and each has its own criteria and target group, for example some are all female or



only open to young people who are working. Blue Triangle Housing Association (BTHA), the housing association arm of the YWCA, is one of the largest providers of accommodation for young single homeless people in Glasgow. At the time the fieldwork was conducted they had four residential care projects in Glasgow which came within this category of medium support. Most of the young people accommodated in these hostels were also vulnerable, and where there was a shortage of places they generally prioritised 16 and 17 year olds. The average length of stay in these projects was around 6 months.

There are also a range of housing projects in Glasgow offering lower levels of support. These are aimed at older and more independent young homeless people, and staff here usually offer general advice and guidance rather than individual counselling and support. The BTHA had two youth accommodation projects in the city which offered light support when I conducted my research, as did the YMCA. The supported scatter flats provided under Glasgow City Council's YHS probably also come within the category of low support, although the intensity of support should vary according to the needs of the young person (see Chapter 1.3). In addition, at the time of the fieldwork there were two supported accommodation projects run by the local authority which offered furnished flats and home support: Southdeen Complex in Drumchapel (see below) and the Mitchelhill Flats Project in Castlemilk.

### *The Adult Homelessness Agencies*

There is a network of agencies which provide services to homeless adults in Glasgow. Adult homeless accommodation is generally of a poor quality and offers little or no support. It is thus acknowledged to be inappropriate for young homeless people. However, many homeless youngsters aged over 18 still find themselves in this network. There were four providers of adult homeless accommodation in Glasgow at the time of my fieldwork:

- Glasgow City Council has 7 adult hostels (4 male, 2 female and 1 mixed) which provide a total of 1,300 bed spaces. These are the 'least bad' of the adult hostels but are nevertheless large-scale, institutionalised, drab environments which offer residents very little support. As with the HAC, applicants must be

statutorily homeless and have a local connection with Glasgow to be admitted. There is a hostels rehousing programme to move residents into more appropriate accommodation in the community, and an upgrading programme to improve facilities within these large hostels.

- A number of voluntary organisations manage adult hostels in Glasgow, including the Salvation Army, Talbot Association and Church of Scotland. These are often poor quality, traditional hostels, but there have been improvements in this sector in recent years and some higher quality projects are now being developed. One example is the Salvation Army's purpose-built hostel in East Campbell Street which offers a good standard of supported accommodation in flats and bedsits.
- Commercially run hostels in Glasgow offer an extremely poor quality of accommodation. There were 3 of these establishments when I conducted my research, offering almost 350 bedspaces.
- The 'lowest rung' on the homeless accommodation ladder in Glasgow when I conducted my fieldwork was the Bishopbriggs Resettlement Unit run by the Department of Social Security - otherwise known as 'The Spike'. This offered dormitory accommodation in appalling conditions, and was generally the last resort for people with nowhere else to go. This has now closed.

There are also various support services available to homeless adults. For example, there is an adult Homeless Team in the social work department which provides a service to hostel dwellers and rough sleepers in Glasgow's city centre. It may assist homeless young people over age 18, but scarce resources mean that they would probably have to be particularly vulnerable to be allocated as a case. There are also day centres in Glasgow, such as the Wayside Club and the Salvation Army Day Centre, which offer cheap meals, advice and assistance to single homeless people, and various organisations operate soup runs in the city centre.



### *My Sample*

I contacted 12 of the sample of 25 young people for the biographical interviews from this city-wide homelessness network, and I endeavoured to represent all these different 'tiers' of the system. Appendix 5 presents the list of organisations from which I drew my sample.

### **The Network of Youth Agencies in Drumchapel**

I contacted a broad range of agencies working with young people in Drumchapel in the course of this research. However I only describe below those agencies which helped to provide the sample of young people for the group and biographical interviews.

- Southdeen Supported Tenancies was a housing department project but was not part of the YHS (see Chapter 1.3), as it was already in operation when the YHS was implemented. Southdeen offered 25 single flats in a 'core' complex for young people aged 16-20 years old. It had 24 hour support but at quite a low level. There were also furnished self-contained flats with more limited support provided in the surrounding area. This was a youth housing resource and young people did not have to establish that they were homeless to gain access to it. It was a also planned entry facility, and did not provide direct access accommodation. Southdeen was established because it was noted that more than half of all tenancies granted to under 20s in Drumchapel failed within 6 months. The procedure established was that all single 16-20 year olds applying for housing in Drumchapel were subject to a joint assessment by social work and housing staff at Southdeen. They decided what was the most appropriate accommodation option for each young person depending on their level of 'vulnerability'. These accommodation options included mainstream accommodation; furnished scatter flats; the Southdeen core complex; or more supportive accommodation in the city-wide network. The Southdeen core complex has closed since my research but the YHS is now operational in Drumchapel.

- The Independent Living Project was a social work department initiative which supported young people in Drumchapel to sustain independent living. Some of the young people they assisted were in the early stages of tenancies and others were living in supported accommodation of various types. Given its limited resources, the project targeted only the most vulnerable and damaged young people, usually with a background in residential care.
- Drumchapel Detached Youth Work was an Urban Aid project working with young people aged 12-25 years of age living in the area. It focused upon young people who were not in contact with other agencies and services. The detached youth workers provided both a drop-in and a street work service, and offered young people individual support and counselling and a range of group work activities.
- Drumchapel Opportunities established a Young Person's Project to cater for young people who had failed, or been failed by, existing youth training courses. It provided a 10 week capacity-building course for 10 young people at a time.
- The Youth Enquiry Service was a Community Education Service project which offered information and support, including advocacy, to young people in Drumchapel. It was more than an advice agency, as young people became involved in various activities through the project, and some used it as a social venue similar to a youth club. Young people could also gain access to office facilities such as telephones, printing and stationery through YES. It was financed through Urban Aid.

All of the young people who took part in the group discussions were contacted through these local agencies in Drumchapel, as were 13 of the 25 who participated in the biographical interviews. Appendix 5 presents the breakdown of the samples of young people between these organisations.



## **Conclusion**

This chapter has described the social and economic environment of the principal location for the study - Drumchapel - and summarised the network of services available to the young people who were the subjects of this research. Thus the local context has been set for the research findings presented in Parts 2 and 3 of the thesis.

## **PART 2**

### **THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**



## CHAPTER 2.1: THE MEANING OF HOME AND HOMELESSNESS

### Introduction

This chapter develops the working definition of homelessness used in this research. It begins with a brief review of the general literature on the definition of 'homelessness' and concept of home'. I then turn to consider evidence from previous studies on the meaning of home and homelessness to young homeless people, before presenting my own findings on young people's definitions of these terms. This data is used to construct a 'home to homelessness continuum' (Watson with Austerberry, 1986, p.9) which forms the basis of the definition of homelessness adopted for the remainder of the thesis.

### The Definition of Homelessness

There is a statutory definition of homelessness in Britain which was summarised in Chapter 1.3. It is not particularly useful for our purposes here because it is primarily intended as a device for rationing council housing rather than capturing the nature of homelessness. Therefore I will concentrate on what Bramley (1988) has termed 'commonsense' definitions of homelessness rather than official ones. There is no single, simple definition of homelessness, but rather a range of recognised definitions. Organisations campaigning on behalf of the homeless will generally press for the widest definitions of homelessness, whereas governments will often define it more narrowly to contain the size of the problem they have to tackle. Bramley (1988, p.26) sets out a list of housing situations which may be defined as homelessness subsumed under the general heading of '*the lack of a right or access to their own secure and minimally adequate housing space.*' Watchman and Robson (1989) offer a similar, but clearer, account which forms the basis of the following discussion.

1. The narrowest definition is 'rooflessness', whereby only those without shelter of any kind should be considered homeless; for instance, people who are sleeping rough, newly arrived immigrants and victims of fire and floods.
2. 'Houselessness' is a wider term which includes those who are living in emergency and temporary accommodation provided for the homeless such as

night shelters, hostels and refuges. It also covers people who reside in long-term institutions, for example psychiatric hospitals, simply because there is no suitable accommodation for them in the community. Another group in this category are households staying in bed and breakfast hotels and other places which are unsuitable as long stay accommodation.

3. A third definition of homelessness includes people who have insecure or impermanent tenures such as squatters, those living in hotels and holiday lets, tenants under notice to quit and people staying with friends or relatives on a temporary basis.

4. Those who live in intolerable housing circumstances may also be considered homeless. This refers not only to severely overcrowded or substandard accommodation, but also to situations where relationships within the household are highly unsatisfactory, particularly where there are threats to personal safety.

5. Households which are involuntarily sharing accommodation because they cannot secure separate housing may also be considered homeless.

There has been increasing concern in recent years about the plight of the 'hidden' homeless. People can be considered to be 'visibly' homeless because (Webb, 1994):

- their homelessness is recorded in official statistics, that is, they have applied to and/or have been accepted by a local housing authority as homeless; or
- they are in contact with homelessness agencies and/or staying in the official homeless accommodation network; or
- they are sleeping rough in visible areas or on known sites, for instance, in the city centre.



Conversely, then, the 'hidden' homeless are those whose homelessness is not visible in these respects. The concealed households in category (5) above are the main group usually referred to as hidden homeless, but clearly the homelessness of many of those in other categories can also be hidden. One of the main contributions this thesis seeks to make is to explore hidden homelessness amongst young people.

### **The Meaning of Home**

The definitions outlined above relate mainly to accommodation criteria. However, as homelessness means the absence of a 'home' this focus is too narrow as it is clear that home is not a purely housing based concept.

There is an extensive literature devoted to the meaning of home, and only a few of the more significant contributions are mentioned here. Saunders and Williams (1988) defined the home very straightforwardly as the fusion of household and house to form a socio-spatial unit. Crow (1989), on the other hand, focused on the evolution of the 'modern domestic ideal' in which notions of 'home' and 'family' increasingly run together. He argued that this is in part a reflection of the importance of social relationships in creating a home, but also has ideological roots in the promotion of privatised and consumption orientated lifestyles. Higgs (1989, p.171) explored what she termed the 'metaphysical' notion of home and concluded that it is primarily 'associated with familiarity, both in a physical and an emotional sense'. Therefore psychological factors may be as important as physical housing conditions in the concept of home. Dant and Deacon (1989) contend that having a home is most significant in joining personal identity with place and the social world. Therefore the absence of home must be understood not as a lack of shelter but as a detachment from society and social networks.

Based largely on empirical findings from Watson and Austerberry's (1986) study of single homeless women, Somerville (1992) presented a conceptual construction of six dimensions of home and corresponding dimensions of homelessness. His 'key signifiers' were as follows:

1. 'Shelter' relates to home as a physical structure which offers protection. Homelessness may be defined as the lack of such protection, that is, rooflessness.
2. 'Hearth' connotes the physical warmth and cosiness which enables one to relax at home. Homelessness involves the absence of such warmth and comfort.
3. 'Heart' is an emotional concept, relating to loving and affectionate relations within the home. Homelessness involves the absence of such relationships.
4. 'Privacy' involves the possession of territory with the power to exclude others and to prohibit surveillance. Homelessness relates to the inability to exert such control.
5. 'Abode' simply means some place which can be called home and involves the security associated with a definite spatial position. Homelessness may therefore mean lacking such a reference point.
6. 'Roots' relates to individuals' sources of identity and meaningfulness. The opposite present in homelessness is rootlessness and anomie.

This literature suggests that housing is an important aspect of home, but it is also a concept with significant social, psychological and ideological dimensions. These must be explored with young people to establish a proper understanding of what it is to be homeless.

### **Young Homeless People's Definitions of Home and Homelessness**

Research on youth homelessness has rarely explored definitions of home. An exception is Bannister *et al* (1993) who asked groups of young people to describe their ideal home. The responses focused on having a place of your own, with security of tenure, in a neighbourhood which was 'nice', 'safe' and 'quiet' (pp. 20-21).



There is more evidence on how young homeless people define homelessness. When asked what homelessness meant to them, many respondents in Jones' (1993a) study talked about 'Cardboard Cities' in London. Hutson and Liddiard (1994) also found that rough sleeping was often given as the reason for defining experiences as homelessness, and it was common for young people staying with friends not to describe themselves as homeless. Some young people said that they were not homeless because they did not class themselves as 'dossers' or 'tramps'. Hutson and Liddiard concluded that the degree of security and permanence of accommodation was emphasised more often by young people when defining homelessness than physical conditions. Emotional and psychological factors, such as loneliness and the existence of choice, were also highly significant.

The meanings of home and homelessness to the young people who participated in my research will now be presented.

### *Home*

Safety was given top priority by many young people in defining a home, as James (24) said 'You've got somewhere to stay that you know is safe - that's home.' Living in a 'quiet' and 'safe' area was the most important aspect of home for many young people. To this extent these findings replicate those by Bannister *et al* (1993). However what was particularly interesting was how common it was for young people to closely associate the notion of safety, and therefore home, with living in a familiar community. For example, Liz (17) said the most important aspect of home for her was:

'Knowing the people around you, like your neighbours, and knowing the area. Like I wouldnae like tae be in an area I didnae know anybody... don't think I could call that a home.'

The secure and permanent nature of accommodation was the next most important factor stressed by young people. This involved both formal security of tenure, that is having a proper lease, and also effective security. For example, Grace (16) explained that what was important about a home was that 'You're always welcome, they're no gonnae chip you oot.' A number of young people emphasised

having a place of their own, privacy, and freedom from rules and regulation as key aspects of home.

Material conditions were part of the concept of home but, like Hutson and Liddiard (1994), I found that they weren't given the priority one might expect. Also, the standards required were not particularly high, for instance Vicky (17) said a home just had to be 'decent enough to live in.' That is not to say that young people did not care about material conditions at all, in particular they were concerned that 'you're no ashamed of what it looks like' (Sandra (17)). A number of young people also commented that having decent furniture and decor were important aspects of home, and problems of dampness were mentioned several times.

However, more important than purely material factors seemed to be that where you are living 'feels homely, cosy' (Liz (17)) and 'feels lived in' (Sandra (17)). Personalisation of home and being surrounded by your own things was identified as important. Gerard's (17) idea of a home was: 'Somethin that's got aw your stuff in it, well stuff that you like.' Finally, a number of young people (usually men) associated home with 'family', meaning their family of origin, including some who had very unhappy childhoods. Fraser (19), who had his own house, was the most emphatic about this:

'There's no place like home, that's where your home is, your ma's.'

The meaning of home is clearly changing for many of these young people at this transitional stage of their lives from an emphasis on their parents' home, as with Fraser, to focusing upon their own place, as with Gerard.

The main components of these definitions of home can be summarised as follows: safe and/or familiar neighbourhood; security and permanence of tenancy; independence, control and privacy; decent material conditions; homeliness and personalisation; and family.



All of Somerville's (1992) key signifiers are represented here, with the possible exception of abode. Shelter was present in that there was a presumption by all the young people that the idea of home related to a dwelling of some kind, but material conditions did not seem to be the most significant aspect of home to them. Nevertheless it would be useful to separate shelter from material conditions in the conceptual framework, since shelter simply means having a roof whereas good or poor material conditions is a broader issue.

Young people's notions of homeliness and cosiness accord closely with Somerville's signifier of hearth. Since Somerville commented that hearth corresponds to emotional and physical well-being, these young people's pre-eminent concern with safety could perhaps also be subsumed under this heading. Similarly personalisation of home could most easily be accommodated under hearth. Home as heart is most clearly expressed by those young people who linked home with family, but also in the emphasis so many of them placed on local social networks.

However, it is difficult find a place in his typology for the security and permanence of tenure which was such an important part of home for young people. It would accord most closely with the privacy and control category, but it may be best to introduce an additional signifier (perhaps 'stability?') to the conceptual framework. These young people's emphasis on familiar neighbourhood has links with Somerville's signifier roots, but the territorial nature of this component must be stressed. It is similar to Hayward's (1975, p.5) notion of 'home as territory' which he explains as psychological ties to a local area, usually the vicinity around a dwelling, and involves 'familiarity, belongingness, predictability, and a spatial framework of behaviour'.

### *Homelessness*

The most common definition of homelessness given was having 'nae permanent hoose.' One group of young women said:

Vicky (17): 'Homeless is when you've no fixed abode.'

Kirsty (17): 'You're no settled in anywhere.'

Jennifer (17): 'You don't have a permanent address.'

A few young people equated homelessness with rooflessness, for example when I asked Alan (19) if he had ever been homeless he told me 'Aye, a few nights I've slept in a close.' However even those young people who initially explained homelessness in terms of rooflessness readily agreed that other situations, such as moving around friends' houses, was also homelessness. It was mainly school pupils, none of whom had ever left home or been homeless, who defined homelessness as 'Cardboard City.' For instance Fiona (17) said homelessness meant:

'People on the street in cardboard boxes... nae money for food or anythin, begging up the toon and everythin.'

Several other young people who had been homeless mentioned seeing television programmes which portrayed the street homeless in London, but they generally recognised this as only one aspect of homelessness. As Liz (17) said:

'I've never actually been homeless in the sense you see on the news - living in Cardboard City or anythin like that. I've never been like that although I have been homeless....cause I didnae have a fixed address.'

Therefore the definition of homelessness offered by young people in this research seems to be rather wider than that found by Jones (1993a), but the emphasis on security and permanence of accommodation replicates the findings of Hutson and Liddiard (1994).

Issues of rejection and social detachment were highlighted by a number of young people. A group of young women said homelessness meant:

Karen (18): 'Naewhere tae turn tae.'

Jackie (17): 'Naebody wants them.'



Some young people associated homelessness with the absence of family. For instance George (18), when discussing young people staying with friends, said:

'They've no got their ain family, I'd say it's homeless. If you're no wi' your ain family, in your ain hoose, you're homeless.'

Emotional and psychological issues were often mentioned when young people were asked what they thought were the worst aspects of homelessness. Some young people emphasised 'no feeling loved', while others stressed feelings of powerlessness. For instance Sandra (17) said:

'You don't think you have any control over your life. It's all in someone else's hands. You don't know if you're gonnae be staying there permanently or whether you're gonnae have tae move again.'

It is important to consider not only young people's general definitions of homelessness but also the circumstances in which they define themselves as homeless. Most young people who had left home in a sudden and unplanned way said that they felt homeless as soon as they left and didn't know where they were going to go. This is similar to the findings of Bannister *et al* (1993) that the realisation of homelessness was fairly immediate. Young people were particularly likely to say they felt homeless when they approached the HAC. This is unsurprising as you have to demonstrate that you are homeless to gain assistance from this agency.

However, some young people, such as Iain (18), would adopt fairly wide definitions of homelessness, but if asked whether they had ever been homeless would emphasise that they were never in the situation of having absolutely nowhere to go. There seemed to be an issue of self-respect, particularly among the young men, that they were never completely abandoned by family and friends and it had been their choice not to approach these people for help. Several young people became nervous and unsure when asked directly if they had ever been homeless, or offered ambivalent responses. For instance Morag (18), who was staying in a youth residential project, told me that she did feel homeless, but then

added 'I'm no really homeless, cause I've got somewhere tae stay, there's people worse than me oot on the streets.' This is perhaps just a recognition that there are different types and degrees of homelessness. The key point is that while young people may have a fairly broad understanding of homelessness, certainly wider than rooflessness, the stigma and social rejection they perceive in being homeless may make them unwilling to apply the label to themselves.

To summarise, the principal aspects of homelessness highlighted by young people were insecurity of accommodation; rooflessness; rejection and social detachment; and powerlessness. These correspond to Somerville's (1992) key signifiers of lack of shelter (rooflessness) and heartlessness (social detachment). However, there is no place in his typology for the general feeling of powerlessness young people expressed; the closest signifier is lack of privacy but this is too specific. Again, there is a need for a signifier to connote insecurity as a main component of homelessness.

It is significant that, except as regards the complete absence of shelter, material conditions were not mentioned at all by these young people in defining homelessness - not even in the sense of cosiness. In contrast, poor material conditions were a key aspect of homelessness emphasised by single homeless women in Watson and Austerberry's (1986) research. The explanation for this probably lies in the different experience of homelessness of these two groups. Most of Watson and Austerberry's sample were living in hostels and other institutional settings, and so emphasised the material deficiencies in these environments. The young people I interviewed were more often moving around friends' houses, and were therefore in 'normal' domestic settings with reasonable material standards. However, their position of insecurity within these households made them feel homeless. It may also be a product of their differing stages in the life course: the adult women in the Watson and Austerberry's research were talking about having their 'own place', or rather the lack of it, whereas these young people may have had the lack of welcome at their parents' homes at the back of their minds.



It is also interesting to note that, while young people identified similar dimensions in the meaning of home and homelessness, they were sometimes given different weight in defining the two concepts. Security of tenure was the key factor young people identified in defining both. But local area, homeliness and material conditions were far more emphasised in the meaning of home, whereas lack of shelter and lack of social relations were given much greater weight in the definition of homelessness.

### **Homelessness to Home Continuum**

Home and homelessness are clearly complex and multi-dimensional concepts, and it is important that this be acknowledged in homelessness research and policy. However it is also necessary to develop a practicable definition of homelessness, and, in my view, this can only be done by focusing on the housing dimension of their situations. Young people's own views on whether a range of accommodation circumstances constitute homelessness and or having a home are presented next.

#### *Rooflessness*

Practically all of my sample defined rough sleeping, even for very short periods of time, as homelessness.

#### *Staying With Friends and Relatives*

Moving around between friends' and relatives' houses was the main circumstance young people had in mind when they defined homelessness as having 'nae permanent hoose.' As Iain (18) said:

'They are homeless, they've got homes tae go tae, but they're no secure homes. They're no somethin you can very well call your ain hoose or whatever.'

Moving around relatives' houses without a secure base was also generally defined as homelessness, but there were some important differences between being accommodated by friends and by relatives. Generally speaking, young people seemed to prefer to stay with relatives than friends, and were less embarrassed to ask them for help. As Stuart (18) explained 'Family take it easier, they cannae

refuse me.' Also, arrangements with friends tended to be very short-term, whereas staying with relatives, usually siblings, was sometimes relatively long-term.

### *Staying in Adult Hostels*

In this thesis the term 'adult hostel' denotes traditional, large scale hostels for single homeless people. The small number of young people I met staying in such environments generally considered themselves to be homeless. One group interview contained several young people who had experienced adult hostels in the past and the consensus of opinion was this situation constituted homelessness.

### *Staying in Youth Residential Projects*

The term 'youth residential project' is used in this thesis to denote hostels for homeless young people, direct access and planned entry, and also youth housing projects which are not specifically aimed at homeless young people. They are considered together here because young people themselves seem to make little distinction between these two types of provision. There was a mix of views from young people about whether they had a home or were homeless when they were staying in youth residential projects.

Several young people did consider a youth residential project their home. For example, Ricky (19) said that he felt that the young persons' hostel he stayed in was home because he liked the people there and the way it looked 'like a normal house inside.' Sandra (17) who was staying in the Southdeen complex in Drumchapel (see Chapter 1.3) felt that it was now her home. She explained:

'You've got a place tae come tae. Knowing that it's mine as well.  
Naebody can come in and say, dae this, dae that.'

The control she felt that she had, in contrast to her previous experience of staying with friends, was enough to make it feel like home. Similarly Craig (17) who had previously stayed with friends also considered Southdeen his last settled home.

However, many young people still felt homeless in youth residential projects, and, like Jennifer (18), described them as 'homeless units.' Janet (19) explained why



she didn't consider the hostel she was staying in home: 'It's no mine is it? It doesnae say ma name on the door.' Gerard (17) didn't feel that Southdeen was a home because 'I know that at any time I could be chipped oot of here.'

The explanation for these different attitudes probably lies in the fact that young people emphasised distinct aspects of home. For instance, Sandra stressed the privacy and independence she had in Southdeen, whereas Gerard was worried about the insecure nature of his tenure. The security young people perceived themselves to have did often seem to be an important factor determining whether they considered themselves to be homeless or to have a home in youth residential project.

#### *Mainstream Tenancies and Scatter Flats*

Most of these young people had in mind their own house, usually a council tenancy, when describing what home meant to them. Margaret (17) was the clearest about this: she told me that you only know that you are no longer homeless once you are in your own house paying your own bills.

There was some disagreement, however, about whether people living in furnished scatter flats should be considered homeless. Duncan (21) said people living in these flats are still homeless because 'it's no really yours, nuthin in it's yours.' But Caroline (17) who had her own scatter flat didn't consider herself homeless because she could take over the tenancy once she had lived there for a while. The small number of other young people I spoke to who lived in scatter flats regarded them as home.

#### *Parents' Home*

As mentioned above, a number of young people, mainly young men, closely associated the concepts of home and homelessness with the presence or absence of their family of origin. Many young people, both men and women, stated that their last settled home was at their parents' house, even if they had not been happy there. As Craig (17) said:

'The real thing about ma ma's hoose was that I had family an aw  
that there.'

### *Summary*

There seemed to be a reasonable consensus amongst these young homeless people that sleeping rough and moving around friends' and relatives' houses constitutes homelessness. There was a more mixed picture with hostels: those staying in adult hostels generally felt homeless whereas some young people living in youth residential projects considered themselves to have a home. Young people staying in scatter flats, mainstream accommodation or in their parents' house generally felt that they had a home, even if they were not happy there. Therefore, considering these definitions, it was appropriate that I drew my sample of young homeless people from those who had slept rough, lived with friends and relatives on a temporary basis, and stayed in adult or young persons hostels. I did not select young people who had only ever lived in the parental home, a scatter flat or their own tenancy; although, as Chapter 2.2 will demonstrate, these situations may occur in the course of a homelessness pathway. This distinction forms the basis of the definition of homelessness used in the remainder of the thesis.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has set the parameters for the main research findings by setting out the situations which will be considered to constitute homelessness in this thesis. The next chapter will present the central research findings on young people's pathways through homelessness.



## **CHAPTER 2.2: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PATHWAYS THROUGH HOMELESSNESS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter begins by reviewing evidence from previous studies on the processes of youth homelessness, and presenting a series of research questions and hypotheses based on this literature which will be addressed in the thesis. The framework of homelessness pathways which I have developed in my study is then summarised, before each pathway is discussed in detail. The concluding section of the chapter draws together the principal research findings on young people's pathways through homelessness.

### **Previous Research on The Processes of Youth Homelessness**

As I highlighted in Chapter 1.2, studying the processes involved in youth homelessness has been identified as a priority for research (Hutson & Liddiard, 1994; Jones, 1993a). However, investigating the dynamics of homelessness is acknowledged to be a difficult and complex task. In consequence, few studies have attempted to identify any kind of process in relation to youth homelessness.

Among the exceptions are Bannister *et al* (1993) who developed a very stylised 'pathway to independence' model to explore young people's experiences of homelessness. This 'pathway' presented young people's experiences in the following order: leaving home or care; attempting to return home and/or staying with relatives and friends; experiencing rooflessness; approaching agencies and moving into short term accommodation; moving on to longer term supported accommodation; and finally moving into a permanent tenancy. However, this was not intended to represent the real routes through homelessness of young people, but rather as a structure within which to discuss common stages in young people's homelessness careers. Furthermore, as the authors acknowledged, their research really just explored the experience of the group within the young homeless population who had managed to progress to more stable accommodation through the official system.

More helpful for our purposes is Hutson & Liddiard's (1994) study of young homeless people in Wales. They investigated the notion of homelessness as a 'downward spiral' (p.125):

'We wanted to see if the types of accommodation that homeless people used deteriorated over time and also whether there was evidence of problems increasing with the length of time that they were homeless.'

They identified three phases of homelessness: early, middle and late. They found that most young people initially left home in an unplanned way and stayed with friends or relatives on a short term basis. The authors suggested that many of the 'hidden homeless', whom they defined as those not in contact with homelessness agencies, resolve their problems at this 'early' stage either by returning home or moving into a private flat. The smaller number who leave home or care in a planned way usually move into private flats and bedsits, and become homeless once evicted from this accommodation.

Hutson & Liddiard claimed that almost three-quarters of their sample moved on to the 'middle phase' of homelessness where few stayed with friends and relatives or in private flats, and many were living in youth residential projects. Squatting and the use of adult hostels also became more common at this stage, and young people began to sleep rough for longer periods of time. It was also during this phase that young people began to experience significant problems in finding and keeping jobs. They found that some young people moved out of the middle phase of homelessness into secure housing, often with the help of resettlement agencies, and those who did not were at risk of moving into the 'late phase'.

They calculated that almost half of their sample moved into this late phase of homelessness. Many young people at this stage were viewed as too problematic to be accommodated by youth residential projects and were staying in adult hostels, squatting and sleeping rough for considerable periods of time. Also, these young people were often experiencing other problems such as involvement with crime



and drugs, and few had employment. Hutson & Liddiard also suggested that young people were more likely to be moving between cities during this phase.

The authors acknowledged that this 'career' was an ideal-type, and did not represent the reality of every young person's experience of homelessness. However they argued that it is an accurate reflection of the general trend, and concluded that homelessness should be understood as a progressively problematic and downward process.

Chamberlain & MacKenzie (1994) reached similar conclusions in their study of youth homelessness in Australia. They identified three temporal categories of homelessness - 'short-term', 'long-term' and 'chronic' - and sought to establish the proportions of the young homeless population in each group, using a flow measure over a 12 month period. Their estimates suggested that 30 to 40 per cent of all young people who became homeless in a particular year had a short-term problem; between 40 and 50 per cent were long-term homeless; and 15 to 25 per cent were chronically homeless. They recommended that many of the short-term homeless would benefit from family reconciliation, whereas most of the long-term homeless needed independent accommodation. They commented that the chronically homeless generally have complex needs because they have become enmeshed in a 'homeless subculture.'

Jones' (1993a) study of young homeless people in Scotland suggested that young people with long homelessness careers tend to gravitate towards hostels, and in particular the likelihood of using adult hostels increases with the length of time homeless. She also found that young people were more likely to be in prison or sleeping rough later in their homelessness careers, and were less likely to stay with friends and relatives, to return to the family home, or to have their own tenancy.

At first glance it appears that the research by Stockley *et al* (1993) paints quite a different picture from the studies reviewed above. They explored the experiences of young people in the south of England who were considered to be 'at risk of homelessness' because they had been in local authority care, were on probation, or

had approached agencies for assistance. The authors divided the places in which young people may stay into three categories: domestic (parents' home or foster home, shared house and own house); institutional (hostels, prison, hospital and children's homes); and temporary/less adequate (squats, rooflessness, friends' houses and hotels). Their main survey suggested that there was a general movement away from domestic and less adequate accommodation into institutional. On the basis of evidence from their follow-up study (see Chapter 1.4) they concluded that (p.17):

'The evidence, although not definite, suggests that once young people leave their childhood home environment, some are likely to go through a period of accommodational instability possibly making use of more marginal types of accommodation, before moving into more permanent or more adequate accommodation. By itself this need not necessarily be a matter for concern since they may move about for what they consider very good reasons.'

However, this more positive finding about young people's movement through homelessness is not necessarily at odds with that of the other studies. It could be true that while most young people who experience a period of homelessness after leaving home are able to move on to more satisfactory housing, the smaller group who remain homeless find their situation progressively worsening. Stockley *et al's* study is based on a wider group which includes not only young people who have actually been homeless but also those perceived to be at risk of homelessness. Also, they could be seen as tracing the progress of the wider group who do manage to move out of homelessness before the 'late' or 'chronic' phases described above.

The overall impression given by this literature is that all young people start off on a similar pathway of homelessness, but some manage to 'exit' at various stages and there is a progressive decline in circumstances for those who remain. As highlighted in Chapter 1.2, this has presented a rather homogeneous picture of young homeless people and little consideration has been given to the existence of distinct processes and patterns of experience. At the same time, most attempts to



identify subgroups within the homeless population have been static in nature, for example, the Scottish Homes Typology of Homelessness (Johnson *et al*, 1991). The main challenge for this research, therefore, was to integrate process and differentiation in the study of youth homelessness.

The key questions posed by this literature review are:

- Is there one main, progressively problematic route through homelessness which most young people follow, exiting at different points? Or are there a number of different pathways which young homeless people take? Why do young people take different pathways/exit at different points?
- Is homelessness generally a short-term condition from which young people move on, and should it be viewed as a normal and unproblematic aspect of their transition to adulthood?
- Is there an overall drift in young people's homeless careers from domestic type accommodation into institutional provision, particularly hostels? Do they tend to move from young persons to adult hostels as their homeless career lengthens?
- Do young people sleep rough for longer periods of time as their homeless careers progress? Are they more likely to spend time in prison and to be moving between cities later in their homeless careers?
- Do the 'hidden homeless' tend to resolve their problems at an early stage in their homeless careers by moving back to the parental home or into their own tenancy? Or can they remain hidden homeless for long periods of time without coming to the attention of homelessness agencies?
- Do young homeless people's additional problems, such as unemployment, drug use, offending and poor health, pre-date their homelessness or occur as a result of their experience of homelessness? Do they worsen the longer they are

homeless? Is length of time homeless the most important factor influencing the seriousness of these additional problems?

The pathways through homelessness presented in the remainder of this chapter will address most of these issues, but some topics will be dealt with in greater depth in later chapters of the thesis.

### **The Pathways Framework**

The principal research question this thesis seeks to address is whether young people follow a uniform route through homelessness or a series of distinct pathways. I concluded that subgroups within the young homeless population did experience quite different forms of homelessness. I identified six main pathways through homelessness amongst my sample of young people. These pathways were based on three key variables:

- The *status* of the young person's accommodation as official or unofficial. Hostels, temporary flats, scatter flats and bed and breakfast hotels are part of the official network of homeless accommodation. Unofficial accommodation includes rooflessness, staying with friends and relatives, returning home on a temporary basis and squatting.
- The *stability* of the young person's accommodation. That is, whether their accommodation circumstances vary widely and often.
- The *location* of the young person's homelessness. That is, whether they are homeless within their local area, elsewhere in Glasgow, or in another city or town.

The six pathways are:

Pathway 1: Unofficial homelessness in the local area

Pathway 2: Alternating between the official network in the local area and unofficial homelessness in the local area

Pathways 3: Stable within the official network in the local area



Pathway 4: Alternating between unofficial homelessness in the local area and the city-wide official network

Pathway 5: Staying within the city-wide official network

Pathway 6: City centre homelessness

These pathways represent either the whole of someone's experience of homelessness or a distinct and significant stage in their homeless careers. These six pathways do not represent all possible permutations of the three variables, but simply those combinations I found present in my sample's experience of homelessness.

All of the pathways will now be examined in detail. In each section the homelessness pathway is described and the characteristics of the young people who take it are summarised. The routes into each pathway are then investigated, that is, the circumstances under which the young people left home and whether they generally experienced another form of homelessness first. Next, young people's motivations for taking particular pathways through homelessness are explored. Motivational factors are discussed at greatest length under Pathways 1 and 6 as these young people's motivations are found in a diluted form in the other pathways. The routes young people take out of pathways are then investigated, and this relates both to people moving onto a different form of homelessness and managing to 'exit' altogether. Finally, each of these homelessness pathways are illustrated with a biography of a young person. Pathway 4 takes a different form because I found only one person in my sample in this category, so I simply summarise the pathway and present his biography.

This framework of pathways were constructed on the basis of the biographical interviews, and the number of young people in the sample of 25 who came within that category for the bulk of their homelessness careers is indicated at the beginning of each section. However, in describing and illustrating these patterns I also draw on the experiences of young people who participated in the group interviews, and on the comments of those in the biographical sample who experienced that form of homelessness at some point in their careers. This means that the number of young people referred to in the course of the discussion on

each pathway usually exceeds the total given at the beginning of the section. Another point to note is that the description of these pathways is based not only on historical material gathered in the biographical interviews, but also on the follow-up data which allowed me to test whether these homelessness patterns were sustained. Broader issues relating to young people's progress are discussed in Chapter 2.3.

### **Pathway 1: Unofficial Homelessness in The Local Area**

#### *Description of Pathway 1*

There were 5 young people out of the sample of 25 who spent the bulk of their homelessness career on this pathway. There were also a great many other young people in the group and biographical interviews who reported similar experiences. They:

- stayed with relatives and friends from their local area, often on a very short term basis, sometimes for longer periods of time.
- frequently returned to the parental home.
- slept rough in their local area, usually intermittently for short periods, but sometimes for considerable periods of time.
- sometimes moved between their local area and other cities but did not sleep rough in Glasgow city centre.
- did not stay within the official system of accommodation, in the city centre or in their local area.

Nearly all young people began their homelessness careers by spending a short period unofficially homeless in their local area, but for some it was a long-term homeless condition and it may even constitute their entire homelessness career. I uncovered a strong pattern of local area homelessness in Drumchapel. Not only was it by far the most common form of homelessness amongst the young people I met, but many of these interviewees told me that their siblings and friends had similar homeless experiences.



A key aspect of this pathway was being in and out the parental home 'like a yo-yo', particularly early on in the homelessness career. Many were like Kate (17) who said 'I've been booted oot millions of times, I've left home millions of times', or like Jon (18) who only stays with his parents some nights 'then I go and stay other places.' They frequently returned home, sometimes on an explicitly short-term basis, but more often there were attempts to return home for good which did not work out.

Most of these young people tried to stay with other family members whenever possible, usually older siblings. However, many ended up relying on friends, or more accurately the parents of friends, because they didn't have any family living nearby or had ran out of relatives willing to help. As Fraser (19) said 'through the whole of the family and ended up in pals' hooses.' Sometimes young people managed to stay with a particular household for several months, but usually these arrangements were very short term which meant that they were 'jumpin aboot fae hoose tae hoose' (Karen (17)). They often ran out of close friends to help and began to rely on 'anybody and everybody', and some young people described how you could end up in 'junkies'' houses. Keith (17) summed up this style of living as 'just dossin, that's aw it is man, gettin your head down wherever you can.'

These young people were able to find somewhere to stay most of the time but as Fraser (19) said 'you get the odd night you've got tae kip in a close' because 'you leave it too late tae go tae somebody's door.' Or like Iain (18) become embarrassed to ask for people's help:

'I think there's always been somewhere I could go if I really, really wanted tae. But sometimes I didnae want tae, it didnae feel right.'

Most young people on this pathway had only slept rough for one or two nights in a row, and fairly infrequently, but a few had slept rough in Drumchapel for several weeks or even months. They normally slept in closes, usually near their parents' house, and thus were dispersed throughout the scheme.

A few young men on this pathway had been to other cities, usually in England, but had come back because they were homesick and missed their family and friends. Fraser (19) explained 'when you're doon England and you're Scottish, you've nae family, probably only got 2 or 3 friends.' What is particularly interesting is that some of these young people will move between Drumchapel and other cities but will not stay elsewhere in Glasgow. The reasons for this are explored in the next section of this chapter.

The homelessness of these young people was hidden in every sense. They did not appear in official statistics, they were not staying in the official network of homeless accommodation or in contact with specialist agencies, and when sleeping rough they did so away from the public eye. Furthermore, it was common for young people on this pathway to even conceal their rooflessness from family and close friends. Martin (17) was in contact with his parents throughout a period of two weeks when he slept rough in Drumchapel but:

'I didnae tell them I was sleepin oot on the streets. They thought I was stayin in ma friends' houses. That's whit I said tae them.'

At the same time he told his friends that he was staying with his family.

### *Characteristics of Young People on Pathway 1*

Almost all of these young people had regularly tranted from secondary school, and many of the young men had become involved in drink, drugs and petty crime in early adolescence. To this extent they were typical of all the young homeless people I met. However, while most of these young people had a social worker as children, normally as a result of their tranting, they were less likely than those in other pathways to have experienced residential care. Few of these young people appeared to have suffered deliberate parental abuse as children, and they were seldom completely estranged from their families. They often had frequent, sometimes daily, contact with at least one parent when homeless (usually their mother), and received some level of practical support such as meals and baths. These young people were often very young and quite immature, and may have been unable to cope as yet with the services provided by official agencies. As I



explain below, another defining characteristic is that they have a very high degree of attachment to their local area.

### *Routes into Pathway 1*

The 'in and out' process described above often began when the young person was around 14 or 15 years old, usually when they walked out for a short time after an argument. This pattern generally intensified after they turned 16, and young people were more frequently thrown out rather than walked out at this age and left home for longer periods of time.

The crisis points at which young people were thrown out tended to be when they left school and did not get a job or training place, or when they lost their job or training. This left many of them with no legitimate income, and their inability to pay dig money was often the immediate reason why they were thrown out of the family home. For example Martin (17) was told by his parents:

'If you cannae get any money you'll need tae leave the hoose cause we cannae afford tae keep you cause we're no gettin any money for you anymair.'

It must be borne in mind that many of these young people's parents were also unemployed and it was an immense struggle to maintain an 'extra' adult out of their social security benefits. However, few young people were thrown out solely on financial grounds; it was usually a culmination of tensions which lead to their ejection. These often centred around parents' irritation at the young person hanging around the house or the streets all day because they were unemployed, and not appearing to look hard enough for a job. It was common for young men's parents to argue with them about their criminal behaviour or drug use, both of which increased when they were unemployed. Parental drink or drug problems, difficult step-relationships, and fights between siblings were also important sources of tension. In addition there were everyday teenage arguments about friends, times for coming in, loud music, and so on.

All of these tensions are much more difficult to bear in households afflicted by poverty and unemployment; where everyone is in the house all day getting under each other's feet, and nobody has any money to go out at night. When these young people became a drain on the very limited resources of their families, and were also engaged in behaviour which caused problems for their parents, these pressures often became intolerable. As Denny (17) told me:

'They couldnae keep me anymair. I wasnae bringing any money intae the hoose and I was causing too much trouble tae them as well. So they tossed me oot.'

Unemployment is the core of these young people's problems; if jobs were more readily available many of them would have been able to sort out their problems without becoming homeless. Lack of benefits is another crucial issue, not only because it was so often the final straw that lead to these young people's ejection from the family home, but also because it was the main reason why they could not sustain a place in any other household. Siblings and friends could not be expected to keep them for nothing for more than a short period. As Martin (17) said: 'I felt as if I was takin advantage of them, cause I didnae have any money tae pay them.' Most of these young people could at least have avoided rooflessness if they had had an income and were thus able to contribute to their keep.

### *Motivations of Young People on Pathway 2*

There are two key questions to be addressed in relation to these young people's motivations:

- Why did they deal with their homelessness informally rather than stay within the official accommodation network?
- Why did they stay within their local area when homeless, or move between their local area and other cities, rather than move to other parts of Glasgow?



These issues are in fact closely entwined. Some young people had not approached official agencies for help because they had only left home for short periods at a time. Others had been homeless for more substantial periods of time but lacked the confidence or initiative to approach these official systems, or previous bad experiences had made them suspicious of public services. A few were reasonably content with the arrangements that they had made to stay with friends or siblings. However, the most common reason young people gave for remaining unofficially homeless was that they were not prepared to stay in the HAC or in the city-wide network of hostels, even on a very short-term basis. It is important to note that the research revealed a conscious rejection of these services rather than a lack of awareness about their existence.

Denny (17) explained to me why he had not approached official agencies for accommodation:

Denny: 'They say if I was tae move anywhere it'd be the HAC, I'm no moving doon there.'

SF: 'Why wouldn't you go to the HAC?'

Denny: 'Just aw the things I've heard aboot it. Full of junkies an aw that.'

SF: 'Who did you hear these things from?'

Denny: 'A pal that used tae stay there, sorta. His room got tanned and everythin got took oot it the second night he was in. I'm happy where I am noo cause naebody'll steal nuthin aff me where I am the noo [sleeping rough in Drumchapel], no that I've got much.'

These sorts of 'cautionary tales' also extended to other hostels throughout Glasgow, as Fraser (19) said:

'Don't fancy goin intae a hostel, know whit mean. Aw the hostels are aw full of junkies. Heard of people gettin robbed in them. I don't fancy gettin robbed.'

Clearly concerns about the type of people who stay in hostels and the security of personal belongings were important factors underlying young people's reluctance to use this network. However, by far the most important objection young people had to the HAC and other hostels in the city-wide network was that they were outside their local area.

Before addressing this point in detail it is worth noting that young people's antipathy to this city-wide network was also what prevented many of them gaining access to the local youth housing project (Southdeen Supported Tenancies). This was because they were under the impression that they would be obliged to stay in the HAC first. This was not actually the case. As was explained in Chapter 1.5, Southdeen was a planned entry rather than direct access facility, and young people usually had to wait some time before being interviewed and, if assessed as suitable, being allowed to move in. In the meantime, any young person requiring emergency accommodation from the local authority had to stay in the HAC. However, they were also free to make their own interim arrangements if they preferred, and young people's access to Southdeen should not have been affected by their decision not to stay in the HAC. I did meet a number of young people who had applied to Southdeen and had made their own arrangements rather than use the HAC before moving in (see Pathways 2 and 3). However some young people, including several who had approached Southdeen, clearly thought that staying in the HAC was a 'test' for entry to the local project, and were so put off by this prospect that they were lost to the system. It is unclear whether this was simply the result of a misunderstanding on the part of these young people, or whether the HAC was deliberately used to ration access to Southdeen.

The young people on Pathway 1 expressed a very strong desire to remain in their local area when homeless for three overlapping reasons: social networks, familiarity and territorial boundaries. These are explored in turn.

First, young people's social networks were usually very concentrated in their local area, with all of their friends living locally and very often most of their family. Indeed it was the presence of friends, neighbours and relatives in the local



community who offer them shelter which made Pathway 1 possible. These supportive local networks exist in spite of, or perhaps because of, the poverty and deprivation found in communities like Drumchapel. Young people wanted to remain in their local area to enjoy the practical and emotional support of family and friends living close by. They would have felt lonely and isolated living anywhere else, particularly as they couldn't afford the bus fares to go back and visit regularly and often didn't have ready access to a telephone.

Second, young people's desire to stay in Drumchapel was strongly related to psychological feelings of security they gained from being within a familiar environment; both as regards the people and the physical surroundings. Fraser (19) explained:

'I know everybody in Drumchapel. Well no everybody, but even if I don't know the person, I know the person to see. So I feel safe when I walk about Drumchapel.'

A group of young men described their attachment to Drumchapel:

Ken (22): 'You feel secure because you've been brought up in this area.'

Jon (19): 'Aye, aw your life.'

They did not believe Drumchapel was any 'better' than any other area but at least it was a known quantity, as Karen (17) put it:

'I know what the reality is, I know exactly where the cookie crumbles here... it's no exactly better than anywhere else nowadays, but I've been brought up here.'

Young people's knowledgeability about their 'ain area' meant that they felt they could predict and deal with threats there. As Liz (17) said 'you know what kind of things will happen here.'

However the third, and most significant, reason why young people were reluctant to venture outwith their own neighbourhood was the quite specific threats posed by crossing territorial boundaries among young people. Keith (17) explained:

'Cause you're fae Drumchapel, everywhere else fights wi' Drumchapel... You go intae another district there's a good chance you're gonnae end up fightin. If you say where you're fae you end up gettin battered.'

Young people were particularly anxious to avoid other deprived areas, such as Possilpark, Govan and the Gorbals. Young people seemed genuinely frightened to use the HAC (located in the Gorbals) and hostels in other young people's territory in case they got 'stabbed', 'battered' or 'hassled'. As Iain (18) told me:

'I *couldnae* [his emphasis] go over there [HAC]. There wasnae much point in me going over there and gettin ma heid taken aff, know whit I mean.'

Similar sentiments were expressed by Vicky (17) who approached Southdeen for accommodation but was told she couldn't get an appointment for a few days:

'I said "Where am I meant to sleep?" She said "Well the only thing I can tell you to do is go to the HAC, sorry we cannae help you."... But she doesnae realise that you're scared to go there. I wouldnae go there, I'd rather walk the streets.'

Territorial concerns were voiced by both young men and young women, but were given even greater weight by young men. The dangers they perceived may be exaggerated in some respects, but they do have a basis in reality. The manager of one youth residential project admitted to me that any young man that they accommodated from another area was virtually guaranteed to get attacked by local gangs within a week of moving in.



The fact that some of these young men will move between cities but will not stay elsewhere in Glasgow is probably because these territorial boundaries operate primarily at the intra- rather than inter-urban scale. The 'politics of turf' is a complex and subtle phenomenon and there were territorial boundaries within Drumchapel, as well as boundaries between Drumchapel and other areas of the city. However, the housing scheme was clearly the primary level of attachment for these young people and what boundaries there were within the estate paled into insignificance in comparison to boundaries outwith. So when I asked young people whereabouts in Drumchapel they would want homelessness services to be located the typical response was that of Fraser (19):

'Anywhere, cause I can walk anywhere in Drumchapel, as long as it's in Drumchapel. So you know it's your ain people, your ain area.'

Therefore while there were some complaints voiced about Southdeen, most young people told me that it was OK because 'it's in the Drum.' A group of young men explained why hostels in the local area were much more acceptable:

Stephen (22): 'I think I would go tae a hostel in Drumchapel... I wouldnae go up the toon and Possil and aw that crap... what I'm saying is, you'd feel a lot safer in a hostel in Drumchapel than a hostel in Possil...'

Jon (18): 'Or a hostel up the toon...'

Stephen (22): 'Cause at least you know your ain area.'

The strength of these young people's attachment to their local area is understandable when one considers how limited their experiences of the outside world can be. I met young people who knew not a single person who lived outside of Drumchapel, and some who had hardly ever set foot outside it. The territorialism I discovered in this housing estate in Glasgow resembles the 'localism' Coffield *et al* (1986) found amongst young people in north-east England with similarly restricted experiences. These findings are also supported by research by EKOS (1994) into the feasibility of a foyer in Glasgow. They

found that the more disadvantaged young people interviewed (residents of scatter flats and hostels in Glasgow) strongly preferred accommodation in their local area and had an aversion to the city centre. This was based on a similar 'parochial rivalry' that my research has highlighted, and the careful placing of young people geographically was emphasised lest residents of different areas 'clash'. The more typical young people generally preferred a city centre site for any proposed foyer. This suggests that territorialism particularly affects young people from deprived communities.

Attachment to their local area seemed to be heightened for the young people in this pathway when they became homeless. They felt very disorientated and frightened as a result of being ejected from the family home; to be ripped from their community at the same time and sucked into a city-wide network of hostels in areas they didn't know was a prospect they viewed with horror. This does not necessarily mean that they wanted to stay in Drumchapel for the rest of their lives. On the contrary, some of these young people had ambitions to eventually leave Drumchapel and 'better' themselves. But at the crisis point in their lives when they became homeless they needed the security of remaining within their local community. It did not seem to have crossed the minds of most of these young people to go to the city centre when sleeping rough. Those who did comment on the city centre described it as 'too dangerous'.

### *Routes Out of Pathway 1*

The main routes out for young people who spent a significant period on Pathway 1 appeared to be as follows: to begin using the local accommodation services and so move onto Pathways 2 or 3; to resolve difficulties with their parents and move back home on a more permanent basis; or to get their own mainstream tenancy. These developments were not necessarily the end of these young people's problems. They were vulnerable to further episodes of homelessness if these relationships or tenancies broke down, and some, like Fraser (19), periodically stayed in their own mainstream tenancy as part of a continuing homelessness career.



However, not all of these young people found a route out: some were still in the same unofficial homelessness circuit a year later. Even those who did appear to have moved on had often spent a long time on Pathway 1 first.

Although there were few examples in this research, some young people on Pathway 1, particularly those from areas with no local accommodation services for young people, may eventually move into the city-wide hostel network (Pathways 4 and 5). They will do so very reluctantly and only because they have failed to resolve their problems locally after a long period of time.

I found no evidence of gradual drift from Pathway 1 to Pathway 6 among these young people from Glasgow. In other words, it seems that young people who spend a substantial part of their homelessness careers in their local area do not eventually end up homeless in Glasgow city centre, although they may go to other cities. It could be that the period of 'tracking' used in this research is not long enough to reveal a drift from local area to city centre homelessness, and a shift may occur later once the young people are in their 20s. But I think this is unlikely.

### *Keith's Story*

Keith's mum and dad brought him up as a child. He has a younger sister. They lived in Drumchapel. Keith's dad had left the house about 8 months before I met him because of arguments with Keith's mum but he had come up to see them a few times. His dad cleaned out boilers for a living and his mum didn't work.

I asked Keith how he got on at school: 'Alright, but I dogged it maist of the time.' He started playing truant in Primary 6. At that time he only stayed off about once a month, but in secondary school he stayed off for 6 months at a time because:

'I didnae like school, it was crap. The teachers; the teachers didnae like me. Just didnae get on wi' them cause I was too cheeky. I started uproars in class.'

Despite so much truanting he never had a social worker. His parents 'didnae really bother' about him truanting.

The first time Keith left home he was 14 years old. He stayed at his gran's for two nights and then went back home. He left because he was fighting with his mum and dad about tampering with his dad's car. He went back home when they had calmed down.

Keith said that he got on alright with his parents most of the time as a child but 'When I left school - that was it.' He managed to get two Standard Grades in Maths and English. When he left school he received no social security benefits and his parents:

'Just kept tellin me tae get work: 'Go oot and look for a job'. I just got a YT tae shut them up.'

They wanted him to work to 'Stop me from hingin aboot the hoose and goin out in the streets and gettin intae trouble.' He got a gardening YT with the local authority. He got on OK with his mum and dad when he was working on the YT. However he left after 2 months because 'the money was crap' and 'you never done anythin. All you did was sit on your arse all day.' Once he finished on the YT:

'Then it started. Flung me oot, back in. Flung me oot, back in.'

The longest period Keith spent out of the house was 3 months when he stayed at his friend's mum's house. He left his parents' house because 'They were doin ma box in, I couldnae handle it. Kept gettin hassle.' They were hassling him about 'No workin, on tae me for takin drugs.' He didn't plan leaving home he 'just walked out.' He went back the next day and got his things when his mum and dad were in bed. I asked how his mum and dad felt about him staying at his friend's: 'Couldnae care less.' He said that the first two months at his friend's house were OK but after that:

'I didnae like it so I came back tae the hoose. It wasnae the same [as being at home]. I couldnae walk about the house the same. You've got tae ask tae use the toilet or whatever.'



So one day he just packed his stuff and went back to his mum's. I asked Keith if his parents were happy to take him back: 'No, they werenae bothered.' He then stayed with his parents for another 8 months. During this period: 'Sometimes I got on awright wi' them, sometimes used tae fight aw the time.' They would argue about 'The way I was eatin, I was eatin too much.' He added:

'It was because I wasnae gein them any money either. They're like that: "You'd better start paying money."'

Keith's response was to 'ignore it or told them tae shut up.' He also used tactics of avoidance:

'I hardly ever stayed in the hoose, stayed wi' ma pals. Sometimes I'd go in late, about one in the morning when they are in their bed.'

He also argued with his parents about getting into trouble with the police. When I spoke to him he was due to appear in court on charges relating to stealing cars, breaking into garages and serious assault.

He started signing on for severe hardship payments for the first time shortly before I met him because 'I just knew I wasnae gonnae look for work.'

Keith left home again a month before we met: 'I just took off cause she [his mum] was sick of me.' He decided to leave because 'I couldnae handle it there anymair, all the arguing.'

When I met Keith he was sleeping rough in Drumchapel with a friend. He wasn't working and was no longer receiving benefits. I asked how he was getting money and food: 'Poncing, stealing oot of shops.' He was still going back to his mum's to get a bath and 'just to see if they're awright.' He didn't know if his mum wanted him back, she hadn't said anything about it. His belongings were still in his mum's house. He said that he would probably end up going back to his mum's although

he didn't want to. This was partly because he couldn't bear to sleep rough in cold weather, and partly so he could get benefits again.

A typical day for Keith when I met him was:

'I'd get up, get ready. Go up tae ma ma's, try and get somethin tae eat. Then I'd probably go doss aboot somewhere, walk aboot. Go doon the shops, staun, tap money, get intae debt, stuff like that. Then when it came tae night just sit at a close or somethin.'

I managed to interview Keith again a year later. He had gone back to his mum's and stayed for 6 months. During this time he had slept rough for the odd night in his mum's close when he was thrown out. He had not received benefits when he stayed at home. He then moved into the Southdeen Complex where he stayed for 7 months. He received severe hardship payments whilst staying in Southdeen, but left because of money problems. After that he moved into a friend's mum's house (two closes down from his mum's). This was two months before the follow-up interview and he had been there ever since. He had not slept rough since leaving his mum's. However, he admitted that he would probably get sick of staying in his friend's house. He had been working on a training course with the local authority for a month when I met him, but planned to give it up soon because the money and training were so poor. He had little contact with his family. Keith told me that overall his life was better than before, but it seemed to me that his situation had improved little over the year.

## **Pathway 2: Alternating Between the Official Network in the Local Area and Unofficial Homelessness in the Local Area**

### *Description of Pathway 2*

There were 2 young people out of my sample of 25 who spent the bulk of their homelessness careers on this pathway. There were also a number of other young people in the group and biographical interviews who had experienced Pathway 2. These young people followed a similar pattern to those on Pathway 1, that is, they



stayed with friends and relatives, periodically returned to the family home, and intermittently slept rough in their local area. Again like those in Pathway 1, they did not sleep rough in Glasgow city centre, but one young man had been to another city and then returned to his local area. However, the homelessness pathway of these young people also included periods spent within the official accommodation network in their local area; in Drumchapel this meant staying at the Southdeen Complex or in a scatter flat. Some had presented as homeless at HAC and had stayed there for a few nights before being referred to Southdeen. Others had approached Southdeen directly and either stayed at home or made other informal arrangements until they could move in.

Some young people had stayed in Southdeen for just a few weeks, others for several months. A few had left Southdeen after a relatively short period of time because they had been asked back by their parents. Others left because they found it difficult to cope with the pressure of running their own flat, even with the support provided in Southdeen, because of their youth, inexperience and lack of money. Several had been evicted for reasons such as taking alcohol or drugs into Southdeen; not going to their work; not managing their house properly (e.g. failing to budget properly for food and electricity); and spending too many nights away from their flat.

A number had been in and out of Southdeen several times, including some of those who had been evicted. Therefore Southdeen did allow some young people second chances. A few young people had unsuccessful first stays in Southdeen but had coped much better when they moved back in again later when they were a little older and more mature.

### *Characteristics of Young People on Pathway 2*

Young people in this pathway generally had similar childhood experiences to those on Pathway 1. In particular, most of them had truanted from school regularly and had left the family home for short periods before they were 16. However, there were more young people in this group who had been in residential care, and some had suffered physical abuse as children. Nevertheless, all of these young people stayed in contact with their families after leaving home, and most

received some level of support from them, such as meals. They had usually returned home to stay at least once.

These young people tended to be a little older and more mature than those in Pathway 1, indeed they were often young people from Pathway 1 'further down the line'. This relative maturity may be one reason why they were willing to accept help from official agencies such as HAC and Southdeen and work within the rules to enable them to gain access to accommodation. However, the pattern of moving in and out of the system often indicated that the young person was not yet ready to sustain a tenancy. Those who moved frequently, particularly where the moves were the result of evictions, were often leading rather chaotic lives. The fact that a number of young people in this group had been in care may mean that they were more accustomed to the official system, and were perhaps better informed about how to get help, than those in Pathway 1.

### *Routes Into Pathway 2*

Many young people who experienced Pathway 2 had begun their homeless career in Pathway 1; therefore to a large extent the two groups overlapped. However, some young people began to move in and out of the official sector immediately on becoming homeless.

The circumstances under which these young people left home were, again, similar to Pathway 1. So issues such as unemployment, lack of dig money and young people's use of drugs and alcohol were important. But there was more evidence among this group of serious family problems contributing to their ejection from the family home; including extremely poor step-relationships, parental alcohol or drug addiction, and, as mentioned above, violence.

### *Motivations of Young People on Pathway 2*

The fact that some of these young people had approached the HAC, and sometimes stayed there for a few nights, indicated that they were more willing to use resources located outside their local area than those in Pathway 1. However, those who did approach the HAC usually did so very reluctantly, sometimes after a long period spent unofficially homeless in their local area. Many had no choice



because they had run out of friends and relatives willing to help them. As Kate (19) told me 'it was either that [HAC] or sleeping in the streets.' However, there were also young people who experienced Pathway 2, like Keith (17), who had applied directly to Southdeen and maintained that they would never go to HAC.

Most young people in Pathway 2, including the ones who had approached HAC, displayed a similar attachment to their local area as those in Pathway 1. Most said that, despite their fears about going into a hostel, they felt OK about moving into Southdeen because it was in their local community. In fact most young people on Pathway 2 said that if they had been unable to get a place in Southdeen they would have stayed unofficially homeless in Drumchapel rather than move into a hostel elsewhere in Glasgow. For instance Fraser (19) told me:

'When I was homeless I went doon tae the HAC for a night and they said "Right, we'll put you oot tae the hostels, oot in Govan or something." I just said I wasnae goin.'

He ended up back staying with friends in Drumchapel, but said that he would have returned to Southdeen (from where he had been evicted some time before) if he had been offered a place there.

### *Routes Out of Pathway 2*

Both of the young people who had spent most of their homeless career in Pathway 2 appeared to be in a similar position a year later; that is, they were still moving between the local area formal provision and informal local arrangements. However, a few young people who had experienced Pathway 2 earlier in their careers did seem to have moved on from this pattern and settled within the official network in the local area (Pathway 3), or to have moved back to the parental home on a reasonably permanent basis. I have no evidence of anyone who had experienced this pathway ever sleeping rough in the city centre (Pathway 6).

### *Kate's Story*

Kate's mum and dad split up when she was 2. Her mum brought her up together with her brother who is one year older, and her sister who is one year younger. They lived in Possilpark.

She had only seen her dad occasionally throughout her childhood. Her mum had a boyfriend who lived with them for 6 or 7 years. Kate explained:

'He [her mum's boyfriend] was intae drugs an everythin and when he didnae have anythin it was gettin took oot on us or ma mum or somethin. So like ma mum had to go oot and like try and get money for drugs to keep him happy an everythin. And if he wasnae happy, we werenae tae be happy, know.'

Her mum's boyfriend was extremely violent and was very strict with the children. He made them stay in their rooms most of the time and refused to let them go out to play or watch TV. Kate told me that:

'Ma mum wasnae really noticing either because she was intae drugs herself and she didnae really realise whit was happenin, she just had tae agree wi' him cause he was just such a beast.'

As a result the children had to rely on each other and 'we were really close. Anytime anythin happened tae one of us we would always try to help each other.' Kate's extended family did not keep in touch because they disapproved of her mother's lifestyle. Also, the children lost touch with their natural father for a few years and he didn't know what was going on. Kate said: 'We just didnae think that anyone else should know, we just didnae think it was anybody else's business.'

Kate's brother eventually got a social worker because he was truanting school and only then did social work services become aware of the children's plight and attempt to help the family. All three children were admitted into residential care when Kate was 14 while her mum entered a rehabilitation unit in an effort to come off drugs and escape the influence of her boyfriend.



Kate said that they were relieved to go into the children's home and thought: 'at last, somethin's gonnae change', but they worried about their mother leaving hospital and moving back in with their violent stepdad. They didn't tell social workers what had happened to them for a while:

'Well at first we were too scared tae tell anybody whit was happenin just in case they says tae him "They're tellin us whit's happenin". And then like nuthin was done and we'd go back and get worse off him.'

After a year they left care and went back to live with their mum who by that time had left the rehabilitation unit and had been off drugs for a year. Kate was 15 by then. They moved to Drumchapel. Kate's mum wanted to move away from Possilpark because her boyfriend still lived there and it was 'a really bad drugs area.' She has not taken drugs since and has never got back together with Kate's stepdad. However, Kate feels that these childhood experiences have damaged her: 'I've had a really bad time, just I know it's there and its scarred me.'

I asked how she got on at school:

'Well I had a few friends, but like they knew that ma mum was intae drugs, they knew what her boyfriend was like.... everybody knew everything, and I knew they used to talk about us: "Her mum's a drug addict and she gets beat up".

Kate and her brother truanted from school to escape these taunts. Things improved when they went into care and to a new school:

'That was much better. They knew we were in a home, but they didnae know why, so we made quite a lot of friends there. It was totally different, nicer people cause they didnae know anythin.'

She said that the teachers were also 'extra nice' to them when they were in the children's home and 'it was nice knowin there was somebody there caring about

you.' However, Kate started playing truant again in Drumchapel when she was in 4th year and she gained no qualifications when she left school. She got a YT working in a shoe shop, but she didn't like being a salesperson and so left after a short period.

She told me that things were not good within the family after they went back to stay with their mum. Kate and her siblings were 'wide' with their mum:

'Anything we asked for she was giving us it cause she knew we hadnae had anythin. It got to the stage where we were just taking her kindness for daftness... we can just pull that string that we've no had anythin.'

She thinks her mum was feeling guilty and trying to make up for 'those years that we had bad.'

The first time she left home was a couple of months before she was 16. Her mum was upset about Kate's attitude towards her and told her to leave. She slept rough for one night, then stayed for a couple of nights with her brother's friend's sister before going back home. Things got worse after she turned 16 because she thought 'Well I'm 16 noo, I can dae whit I want.' She said that she was getting drunk and her mum tried to tell her she was too young but Kate ignored her. Her mum threw her out again together with her brother (her sister was only 15 at the time). Her brother stayed with his friend, but Kate couldn't stay there because it was too crowded. She was in touch with Detached Youth in Drumchapel and they told her about the HAC. The HAC verified with her mum that she had been thrown out, and then they gave her a place for a couple of nights. She described how she felt at this time:

'I thought everythin was going awright and noo it's fallin apart for me again, I've naewhere tae stay. It was horrible.'

She then moved to Southdeen but did not do well there because:



'I was just gettin drunk all the time. I wasnae caring aboot nuthin; nae power, nae food, nae nuthin. I was just living on these crisis loans aff the social. On bevvie, comin in aw times in the mornin, steamin.'

She knew it was probably a matter of time before she was thrown out. Her mum asked Kate to come back and after 3 weeks in Southdeen she moved back home.

Whilst she was back in her mum's Kate got a YT in an old folks home and 'I loved it.' But she was still behaving the same way at home and after being back in her mum's for a few months she ended up back at the HAC.

She had been working in her job for 5 months at this point, but she hadn't been handling her money properly and had been missing work because she didn't have the bus fares to get there. When she was in the HAC she phoned her work to say she wouldn't be coming in and they told her not to bother coming back because she had taken too many days off.

The HAC got Kate a place in Southdeen again. She got on much better that time and told me that the staff there could see that 'I was ready to look after maself and a house.' She was in Southdeen for 7 months the second time. She was also in contact with Detached Youth at this time and they helped her apply for a course in Africa which was intended for 'people who hadnae had anythin', and she won a place on it. She had been getting on much better with her mum since she moved into Southdeen and returned home to live before the trip. Southdeen had made an arrangement with her that she would have a furnished flat waiting for her when she came back from Africa. When she came home from Africa her flat wasn't yet ready and she went to live with her mum again. She then moved back into Southdeen for a short period before taking up the tenancy in the scatter flat.

She was staying in the scatter flat with her boyfriend and was 4 months pregnant when I met her. Kate and her boyfriend were both unemployed. It was an unplanned pregnancy and I asked Kate if she was happy when she found out about

it: 'I was happy but I was worried as well: "Can I handle this?" I was really shakin.' However she added:

'Since I fell pregnant I think its helped me a lot because I'm saying tae maself: "Well, I'm just gonnae just be settling doon wi' ma ain family noo and nane of ma kids will ever grow up to go through that." I want a totally different life for ma kid. This is ma start in life, this is ma family.'

I was unable to interview Kate a year later, but I found out that she had moved out of the scatter flat back to her mum's. It was unclear how stable this situation was, and whether her overall situation was better or worse than when I first met her.

### **Pathway 3: Stable Within Official Network in Local Area**

#### *Description of Pathway 3*

There were 5 young people out of my sample of 25 who had spent the bulk of their homelessness career on this pathway. Several other youngsters who took part in the group interviews also came within this category. These young people had stayed for a considerable and continuous period in Southdeen, and some had moved onto a scatter flat. Some of the young people who initially presented to HAC stayed there for a few nights, and Joan (18) had stayed briefly in a hostel elsewhere in Glasgow before entering Southdeen and settling there.

#### *Characteristics of Young People on Pathway 3*

The childhoods of the young people in this group presented a rather mixed picture with few real patterns emerging. Some young people described themselves as having had unhappy childhoods with serious family problems, and had regularly truanted from school. Included in this group were Sandra (18) and Gerard (17) who had spent time in residential care. John (18) and Liz (17), on the other hand, had had reasonably happy childhoods, were good attenders at school, and had no need of social work assistance as children - although their families were clearly under pressure and some of their siblings had had social workers.



The young people in this group were in frequent, usually daily, contact with their parents when they were living in Southdeen or in a scatter flat. They all received some measure of support from their families, including material help such as groceries, loans of money, cigarettes, etc. These relationships often involved mutual support between the young person and their parents, and in several cases young people were the primary givers of help. For instance Liz (17) still looked after her younger brothers and sisters after she had left home, and Joan (18) still cared for her sick father. Therefore the maintenance of these supportive relationships is crucial; not only for the young people, but also for their families.

An important characteristic of young people on Pathway 3, particularly the young women, was that they were generally more mature than the young people on Pathways 1 or 2. This was demonstrated by their ability to sustain a tenancy and to work within the rules to gain a scatter flat.

### *Routes Into Pathway 3*

Some young people in Pathway 3, like John (18), spent some time unofficially homeless in their local area (Pathway 1) before settling down in the official network. Others, like Gerard (17) and Joan (18), approached formal services (HAC or Southdeen) almost immediately on becoming homeless and didn't spend any time unofficially homeless.

Young people in Pathway 3 did not seem to follow the pattern of being 'in and out' of the family home before they were 16. They generally left home after they were 16 because of arguments with their parents, but most returned home to live at least once. The arguments which led them to leave home included the usual tensions about dig money, unemployment, times for coming in, poor step-relationships, etc. Disputes with siblings also featured strongly. Several young women in this group, including Joan (18) whose story is presented below, suffered from what I have termed 'domestic exploitation' (see Chapter 3.1), and this was one of the main reasons why they left the family home.

### *Motivations*

These young people were not necessarily making a positive decision to resolve their problems through the official network, often they simply had no family or friends to turn to. As Gerard (17) told me:

'I didnae have friends I could stay with, I wasnae really friendly wi' a lot of people. I couldnae stay wi' ma sister cause she stayed in Bridgeton, I couldnae get fae there in time in the morning here for ma job. I couldnae stay wi' ma brother cause he stayed in here [Southdeen], and I couldnae stay wi' ma other sister cause she was in Saltcoats.'

Young people on Pathway 3 displayed a similar attachment to their local area as those on Pathways 1 and 2, and had a strong desire to be accommodated there. If there had been no local network of accommodation in Drumchapel there is a clear split in this group between those like Joan (18) who told me that she would (very reluctantly) have entered the city-wide official network (Pathway 5), and those who would have remained unofficially homeless in their local area (Pathway 1). An example of the latter is Gerard (18) who told me that he would have slept rough rather than stay in HAC but felt OK about moving into Southdeen.

### *Routes Out of Pathway 3*

Most young people on Pathway 3 were still stable within the local network a year later, and were mainly in their own scatter flats by then. One young woman, Liz (17), had decided to go back home to stay with her parents, and this seemed to be on a permanent and satisfactory basis. None had been evicted from Southdeen or their scatter flat.

### *Joan's Story*

Joan's mum and dad divorced when she was one. Her dad brought Joan and her older brother up. They lived in Drumchapel. Joan's mum got custody of her older sister, but didn't keep in touch with the other two children and Joan has never even seen her. Joan's sister contacted her siblings when she turned 16 and has kept in touch ever since. She gave Joan her mum's phone number but: 'When I try



to phone her she doesnae want tae speak. So if that's her way of lookin at it I'm no gonnae bother wi' her either.'

Joan's dad's girlfriend moved in with them when she was 7. Joan didn't get on with her. The girlfriend died of pneumonia when Joan was 10. She told me that her dad wasn't there when his girlfriend died, because he had fallen out with her over Joan, and he has never really got over it. She commented: 'I get the blame of everything. From then on its just been wild.'

Joan's dad had been 'really ill' for a few years and Joan, and to a lesser extent her brother, looked after him. She described these responsibilities: 'I've had tae stay wi' him, help him, dae all his washing an aw that.' As well as looking after her dad she was left with all of the housework to do since she was 11: the cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping and budgeting. She explained that even before her dad was ill:

'I'd help in the hoose an that, we would all take turns, but in the end it would just get round tae me daein everything.'

Joan's brother left home when he was 16 and went into Southdeen. She was 12 at the time. Her brother left home because 'him and ma dad didnae get on at all.' She was then left to look after her dad on her own:

'He started gettin worse and that's when I stopped goin tae school and started staying in the hoose wi' him... So its always been me, I've been brought up to be the mother of the hoose instead of the daughter.'

They got no help from health or social services. Joan did get some support off her dad's sister, but couldn't rely on her aunt too much because she was looking after Joan's senile grandfather and had two young children herself.

Joan stopped going to school when she was 13. She explained why she disliked school:

'I just thought their attitude towards me was exactly the same as toward my brother, and I was entirely different from him. They were just makin oot as if I was the same as him. Every day you went into the music class it was: "You're just as bad as your brother." And I just felt degraded and I was like that: "Well, if that's the way youse feel I'm just no coming back.'"

Most of the time she stayed off school she stayed at home and looked after her dad. I asked how her dad felt about this:

'Well he didnae like it but it had to be done. I mean, I wouldnae have left him himself. I'd rather stay at home than go away to school and worry in case anythin had happened to him.'

She was sent to a Children's Panel and was given a social worker who found her a place in a day care centre. She attended the day care centre because she liked it much better than school:

'It was mair easy goin. Teachers *tell* you whit tae dae, whereas in the day care centre you got *asked* whit you wanted tae dae [her emphasis]. You got an opinion of things; whereas in the school you were just told tae dae this and dae that.'

Joan went to the day care centre for a year, and they told her she could stop going at Christmas when she was 15 years old. She gained no qualifications when she left, and didn't even sit any exams. The Children's Panel decided that she no longer needed a social worker when she was still 15.

When Joan left the day care centre she applied to go to college to study childminding, but they wouldn't accept her because she was so young with no qualifications. I asked what she did instead: 'Nuthin. My dad went back into hospital again for another operation.' She got social security benefits (£21 pounds a week) when she lived at home because she looked after her dad. She had never worked:



'No for the lack of trying. I mean I have tried thousands of places, but I can never ever get anythin cause I huvnae got any qualifications.'

She told me that she got on alright with her dad until she was about 16, although they would 'bicker' occasionally about her dad's untidiness. They really started to fall out when Joan started going out with a boy her dad didn't like: 'Our relationship just went tae hell cause he just didnae like him at all and that's when I ended up in here [Southdeen].' Eventually: 'I just had enough of it and I just packed my bags and left.' Later in the interview she described leaving home rather differently: 'He told me to pack my bags and leave.' Either way:

'That night was the worst fight I've ever had with him so I went to the HAC and that's when I ended up in Branston Court [a young persons hostel in the city-wide network] and then here [Southdeen].'

This fight was very bad because he hit her: 'I didnae like the fact of him lifting his hand tae me cause he's never really done it before, so it was a shock.' She went on to say:

'I just had tae get away from him; I needed space, I needed my ain time tae think about things... I just couldnae live wi' him anymair. It was the pressure, the pressure of looking after him. I know its a terrible thing tae say, but it was day and night, and if I never got anything right he'd start shouting.'

Before Joan left her dad's house her brother had moved back in, together with his girlfriend and their two children. This further aggravated the problems in the household as Joan did not get on with her brother or his girlfriend.

When Joan was thrown out she went to the social work department who told her about the HAC and gave her money to get there. The HAC verified with Joan's dad that he wouldn't take her back and she stayed there for 2 nights. She got

moved to a young persons hostel in the city-wide network (Branston Court) and stayed there for two weeks. She didn't like this hostel because: 'I just didnae know the area. There was naebody I knew.' She then got a place in Southdeen and stayed there for 5 months. She was 'delighted' when she was told that she was moving into Southdeen because it was near her dad. However she would have stayed in Branston Court if she had had to because 'I had no other place to go.'

Joan received severe hardship payments when she moved out of her dad's house. She had to get two crisis loans when she was in the young persons hostel as her benefit wasn't sorted out at that point.

Joan moved into a scatter flat in Drumchapel 3 weeks before I interviewed her. She had just started a college course in office administration. A typical day for Joan before she started college was going up to see her dad, then visiting her aunt and a friend in Anderston, and then coming back to Drumchapel at night:

'Same thing every day, that's how I had tae get a college course cause there was nuthin tae waken up for in the morning.'

Her relationship with her dad had improved:

'...now that I'm away from him, I get on with him a lot better. Whereas when the two of us were staying together I just couldn't speak to him at all.'

I received a questionnaire response from Joan a year later. She was expecting a child very shortly and was living with her boyfriend in the scatter flat. She had stayed in the scatter flat for the entire time since I first met her and had not been homeless again. She was no longer in college and had not worked. She was still in close contact with her dad and visited and looked after him every day. Joan felt that overall her life was better than the year before.



## **Pathway 4: Alternating Between Unofficial Homelessness in the Local Area and the City-wide Official Network**

### *Description of Pathway 4*

Alan (19), whose story is presented below, was the only clear example in the biographical interviews, or in the group discussions, of a young person on Pathway 4. He spent time in the city-wide hostel network, as well as in the official network in his local area. However when he was not using these formal accommodation services he resorted to unofficial homelessness in his local area (Pathway 1) rather than sleeping rough in the city centre (Pathway 6). He therefore slept rough locally, stayed with friends, and frequently returned to the parental home.

The fact that I only found one young person in my biographical sample on Pathway 4 may suggest that it is quite rare for young people to move between local area homelessness and the city-wide network. However, it seems unlikely that all of the young people who are staying in the city-wide network would become involved in the city centre homeless scene if excluded from formal services. Rather, it seems more probable that there will be quite a few, like Alan, who seek refuge back in their local area. This pathway is likely to be more common in areas without local accommodation services for young people, in other words, where Pathways 2 and 3 are not possible.

### *Alan's Story*

Alan's mum brought him up as a child. Alan's dad left when he was 2 years old, his brother was one, and his mum was pregnant with his youngest brother. They were living in Castlemilk at the time. Alan and his brother had to go into care whilst his mum was in hospital having their younger brother because there was nobody to look after them.

Alan's mum contacted nuns she knew in Edinburgh when she came out of hospital and they offered her a caravan in the grounds of the convent. They all stayed in the caravan for a year and they then got a council house in Edinburgh.

The family moved back to Glasgow just before Alan started secondary school because his younger brothers were being bullied. They just 'upped and offed one day' and had to stay in homeless hostels once they got to Glasgow. Alan said that his mum was offered several houses by the local authority but they were all in 'the bad areas ma ma was wantin us tae get away from when we were growin up.' After several months she was offered a house in Castlemilk, which she was a bit happier about because she had stayed there before.

Alan was never again in residential care and he did not have a social worker as a child. He said it was always his brothers who were in trouble and involved with social work services - 'I was the smart one of the family.' He said that his brothers: 'just went against authority, they were like that "I've no got a da tae batter me."' By the time I interviewed Alan his middle brother had a job and his own house and was doing well. But his youngest brother was still at school and was causing his mum problems by truanting. Alan said that his childhood was not very happy but: 'When I think of what ma ma had tae put up with, with three boys herself, I think she done well.'

Alan said that he enjoyed primary school - 'I was quite smart at primary school.' He went to two secondary schools; one when he stayed in the homeless hostels, and another when they moved to Castlemilk at the end of his 2nd year. He did well at English and art and liked creative subjects generally. However he didn't like 'the authority of the teachers, telling you tae dae this and dae that.'

He left school at the end of 4th year with 2 O'Grades and 5 standard grades. He said that he didn't stay on at school because of the influence of his friends: 'looking back it was stupid cause I could have done well but I just ruined it.' He got a YT as a motor mechanic but left after 3 weeks because the pay was so low. He then secured severe hardship payments because:

'Ma ma had chipped me out at the time because I wasnae workin. So it was like a vicious circle: ma ma chippin me oot cause I wasnae workin, I couldnae get a job I wanted in the Careers, I had tae go tae the broo for money. An that was aw ma plans doon the



drain: staying wi' ma ma, gettin a job, start paying ma ma, start getting things organised, driving lessons, things like that. Aw doon the drain.'

Alan later told me that his mum threw him out because he kept fighting with his brothers over their treatment of their mum. He said that he 'went mental' about it one night and threw a hot cup of tea over his mum when he was drunk. Alan was 16 at the time and went to stay in the HAC for a few weeks. He explained:

'Ma ma chipped me oot the first time, I went tae the HAC when I was young enough tae get in there. So I was in there for a wee while then I went up and reconciled wi' ma ma, apologised an aw that. She's like that: "Right, I'll gie you one mair chance."'

Alan then stayed at home for about a year during which time he got a job as a warehouse trainee. He slept rough in Castlemilk a few times during this period:

'A couple of nights, know, ma ma would be like that "Right, you're kicked oot." I'd be like that "Nae bother, I've got somewhere tae stay." Then you get along tae your pal's close door and you're like that "Nah, I cannae dae this."'

His mum then threw him out again for fighting with his brothers and he went back to the HAC. However, he got fed up with the HAC and his mum wouldn't take him back so he slept rough in Castlemilk for a week and a half - the longest period he spent roofless. He slept rough alone but because he was in Castlemilk he 'felt awright cause I had the security of knowin that anybody that came along I would know them.' He told me that he would never sleep rough in the city centre.

He then moved into a friend's mum's house in Castlemilk for about 6 months. After that he went back to his mum's: 'again I got in wi' ma ma.' When Alan was staying at his mum's he was offered a furnished flat in Castlemilk. He moved in and told me that 'everything was fine for a few months' but then his flat was broken into and some furniture was stolen. He was then told by the housing

department that he was 'barred from furnished accommodation.' Alan said that he wasn't told why but he did admit: 'I was hanging around with the wrong crowd when I had the flat, mad car thieves an that.'

Alan's mum again took him back in. When he was living there he lost his job at the warehouse because he had been smoking hash in the toilets. He had managed to keep the job for around 8 months (while he was staying at his mum's, sleeping rough, in the HAC, at his friend's, in his own flat, etc.). He was unemployed for a while and then got a temporary job in a wholesale grocers which only lasted 3 weeks. He was then unemployed until his most recent job (see later).

Alan was again thrown out by his mum and went to the HAC. But he was 18 by then and was therefore too old to stay in the HAC and would instead be placed in an adult hostel. Alan got staff in the HAC to tell his mum how bad the adult hostels were (she had accompanied him to the interview), and she agreed to take him back so long as his probation officer tried to find somewhere else for him to stay. He was then in prison for 4 weeks for stealing a car.

I should note here that Alan had a fairly substantial criminal record by the time I met him, including 18 months probation for blackmailing a local 'pervert' together with a friend. He told me that he used to deal hash when he lived in Castlemilk but 'I ended up smoking maist of the profits so it was a waste of time.' In the end he squared up with his dealer and got out. He explained that for 3 years he took hash, lager or acid every night and got to the point where 'you need a joint to get straight.' But when I met him he said that he was less into drugs than he used to be and that drug taking wasn't a problem in his life: 'I just enjoy daein it, it gets you away fae thinkin about life, aw your problems.'

When Alan came out of prison his mum took him back in but wanted him to leave as soon as possible. His probation officer managed to get him an interview at a young persons' hostel on the city-wide network (Dumbarton Road) and he moved in 6 weeks later. He had been staying in the project for 2 months when I met him. He told me that he liked staying there because it was 'nice and clean an aw that, out the area of Castlemilk where I don't like.' This comment suggests that he



wanted to escape from his local area, despite feeling safe sleeping rough there, possibly because he was in trouble with drug dealers. He later told me that he did not want a house in Castlemilk because he wanted a 'clean slate' and there were people there he didn't want to associate with.

He was not working when I interviewed him but had had a job in a cardboard box factory. He had given the job up because he was told that the social work department (Dumbarton Road was a supplemented hostel, see Chapter 1.5) would take so much off his wages in rent that he would actually be worse off than on benefits. He was waiting on a report from his key worker to find out if he was going to get his own flat, but he wasn't sure that he would get a good report because 'I've had a few warnings lately.'

Alan lost touch with his family for a while after moving into Dumbarton Road. His mum had tried to contact him but he didn't want to see her because: 'I don't respect people who don't respect themselves, cannae stick up for themselves, an ma ma cannae dae that.' However Alan and his mum did get back in contact shortly before I met him, and it was clear that he still cared for her, and she for him judging by the number of times she took him back in.

A typical day for Alan at that time was getting up early, listening to music, having a shower, then going to collect his friend. He then sometimes went to the bookies or got a video out, or visited a nearby young women's hostel to 'see a couple of chicks.'

I was unable to contact Alan a year later but learned that he had been evicted from Dumbarton Road because of his behaviour, apparently there had been a 'major incident'. He had no fixed abode when he left.

### **Pathway 5: Staying Within the City-wide Official Network**

#### *Description of Pathway 5*

There were 9 young people out of my sample of 25 who spent the bulk of their homelessness careers on this pathway. A few more young people I encountered in the group interviews had experienced this form of homelessness. These young

people stayed within the city-wide network of homeless hostels for a considerable and continuous period of time. However, some were settled in one particular hostel, while others moved around the circuit of hostels.

There were two distinct groups of young people on Pathway 5: those staying in youth residential projects (5 of my sample) and those staying in adult hostels (4 of my sample). Those living in young persons accommodation were, at least in theory, being prepared for independent living and their stay in hostels was viewed as a transitional and temporary phase in their lives. In contrast, the young people staying in adult hostels (all the ones I met were young men) seemed to have been dumped in these institutions on a more or less permanent basis.

### *Characteristics of Young People on Pathway 5*

All of the young people on Pathway 5 had had very difficult childhoods, and most had suffered physical abuse. A host of other issues also marred these young people's childhoods such as: the death of a parent; destructive step-relationships; domestic exploitation; serious health problems; criminal behaviour; and drink and drug use. Most of them had been suspended from school or had regularly truanted, and many had run away from home or been thrown out at least once before they were 16. Some had spent time in residential care, and most of the rest had had social workers.

Few young people on Pathway 5 had regular contact with their parents, and they were all angry at their families because of the way they had been treated. However, most of these young people tried to maintain some contact with a member of their family, usually one of their parents or a sibling, although there were a couple of youngsters, including Dougie (19), who were not in contact with any relatives at all. Even those young people who were in touch with their families tended to gain very little material or emotional support from them.

These young people's friendship networks often became limited to other homeless people they met in the hostels. One of the most disturbing aspects of the lives of the young men who stayed in the adult hostels was their lack of contact with the outside world. Some hardly ever left the institution. Robert (19), for instance, told



me that he only went out twice a fortnight - to sign on and to cash his giro. This meant that these young men were completely submerged in an institutional environment and entirely disconnected from ordinary living and working communities.

There was evidence of severe personal problems among this group of young people, particularly those in the adult hostels. They often had serious emotional problems stemming from their difficult family relationships and their social isolation. Almost all admitted to being lonely, as Roger (19) told me: 'Lonely aw the time, just don't think about it.' Heavy drinking, depression and suicide attempts were evident among the most damaged young people. It was clear that most of them would need extensive support if they were to move out of the hostels into more independent accommodation. However, it should be noted that whilst the young persons' hostels offered varying degrees of social support to their residents, the adult hostels provided virtually no formal support to anyone living there.

#### *Routes Into Pathway 5*

There are a number of routes into Pathway 5. Several young people, including Bernadette (17), entered the city-wide official network directly on leaving home. Others, like Kylie (17), moved from city centre rooflessness into the hostel network. A couple of young people, such as Robert (19), spent time unofficially homeless in their local area before settling into the official city-wide network of hostels.

Young people on Pathway 5 left home because of serious, and usually long-term, problems with their parents. A number of young people, including Ricky (17), entered the pattern of being 'in and out' of the family home before finally leaving for good. Others, such as Bernadette (17), left home on a permanent basis practically the minute they were 16. A few, including Dougie (19), left residential care and became homeless when 'aftercare' arrangements broke down.

### *Motivations of Young People on Pathway 5*

Young people on Pathway 5 displayed far less attachment to their local area than those in the previous groups. For instance, Ricky (17) told me that he had wanted to move out of Drumchapel when he left home because: 'I know too many people in Drumchapel, if I stay there I cannae really get a chance for a fresh start.' The reasons why some young people have little attachment to their local area, and may even wish to escape from it, are discussed further under Pathway 6.

It was interesting that despite this weaker attachment to their local area, and certainly no strong desire to stay in a hostel there, most of these young people said that they would like to be permanently rehoused there. However, there were a couple of young people, including Robert (19), who specifically did not want a house in their home area.

### *Routes Out of Pathway 5*

I have little follow-up information on the young people who had been staying in the young persons' hostels because they had usually moved on after a year and had lost contact with the hostel. Unlike the young people who were homeless in Drumchapel, I was unable to gain even 'minimum' information about most of them.

In complete contrast, I was able to re-interview all the young men who had been staying in adult hostels because they were all still there a year later. They had not, therefore, found a route out of Pathway 5.

### *Dougie's Story*

Dougie's mum and dad brought him up as a child. They lived in Easterhouse. He has four younger brothers. Dougie's mum didn't work but his dad had worked on the railways for a long time.

Dougie told me that he got on OK in primary school but had a bad time in secondary school. He didn't like the school rules and was always getting



punishment exercises for carrying on, 'noisin people up', etc. He was suspended from school three times for not doing his punishment exercises. He told me that he also truanted from school, but only now and again.

Dougie was taken into residential care when he was 14 because 'I got skelped aboot too much.' Dougie's dad hit him in the face with a buckle and when he went to school bruised his teachers contacted the social worker department. He thought the children's home he was sent to was 'awright'.

Dougie was in the children's home for 2 years. He then went back to stay with his parents for 7 months when he was 16 but 'it didn't work out.' He told me that his parents were 'awright for so long' but then he and his dad started arguing. Dougie saw his dad hitting his 7 year old brother and: 'I confronted him, told him "Don't ever dae that"... I just couldnae take any mair of it, skelpin ma wee brothers aboot.'

Dougie's mum and dad threw him out three times, and each time he stayed with friends and then went back. Dougie's social worker had kept in touch with him whilst he was staying at home and the last time he was thrown out he went to the social work department and asked if he could go back into care. He said 'It was ma idea, me going back intae a children's home, cause I thought it was for ma safety.' Dougie was still 16 when he went back into care. He wanted to go back into the same children's home but he was placed in a different one because there were no vacancies there.

He decided to do a 5th year at school to 'get somewhere'. But for some reason (he couldn't explain why) he decided to leave in the middle of 5th year and told me 'They werenae gonnae let me go till I started crackin up.' He left school at 17. Dougie didn't know whether he had acquired any qualifications because he wasn't interested in his exam results. He got a retailing YT but left after 3 months because:

'You were always sittin in. The way I look at it, I want tae go oot an learn somethin in a shop, instead of writing. I know writing is

the main thing in a shop an aw, but we were getting crosswords.  
'That's no a job, sittin daein crosswords in your work.'

He got another retailing YT but left that one as well for similar reasons. He stayed in his next YT for longer because they 'got oot in shops' but left when he was 18 because he was getting 'depressed'. When he was in between YTs he received Bridging Allowance.

Dougie left the children's home when he was 18 and was placed in supported lodgings (a social work initiative whereby individuals are paid to accommodate and support vulnerable young people in their own homes). He had three supported lodgings to choose from, and spent a trial period in each of them. He decided to move into one of them but 'that never worked out' because 'I just felt it wasnae ma hoose... I wasnae comfortable at aw.' He was 19 when he left the supported lodgings.

He then stayed with a girlfriend in the east end of Glasgow for a while. However, he got beaten up by a local gang, split up with his girlfriend and she threw him out. He tried to commit suicide around this time by overdosing on paracetamol.

Dougie then approached the HAC because he had been told by his social worker to go there if he needed somewhere to stay. He was placed in several different adult hostels. He explained: 'I just got fed up and started to move about the hostels.' He was fed up because: 'Drugs involved in maist of the hostels. In there it's like people needling up smack an aw that, an I just cannae go that.' He kept going back to the HAC and getting moved between adult hostels until the Bishopbriggs Resettlement Unit (see Chapter 1.5) was the only place they had left and he agreed to go there.

When I first met Dougie he had been staying at Bishopbriggs for 4 weeks. He had been unemployed since he left his last YT and had received IS throughout the time he was staying in hostels. He did some work in the hostel and was paid in cigarettes. He had no contact with his family. A typical day for Dougie was to get



up and have his breakfast and then to do work around the hostel. In the evenings he talked to his friends in the hostel and sometimes went out for a drink.

I managed to re-interview Dougie a year later and found out that he had stayed at the Bishopbriggs Resettlement Unit for the entire time since I had last spoke to him. He had not had a formal job but had done a lot of work in the hostel to pass the time. He still had no contact with his family. He told me that he had had two 'nervous breakdowns' in the past year. His only friends were in the hostel and he did not have a girlfriend. When I asked him whether life was getting better or worse he simply replied: 'Here at the Resettlement Unit is OK.'

### **Pathway 6: City Centre Homeless**

#### *Description of Pathway 6*

There were 3 young people out of my sample of 25 who had spent the bulk of their homelessness career on this pathway. Several other youngsters in the group and biographical interviews had experienced this form of homelessness at some point. They:

- slept rough in the city centre.
- stayed in the city-wide hostel network.
- were often mobile between towns and cities.
- often spent periods in prison, rehabilitation units and hospital.

The key feature which distinguished these young people from those on all the other pathways is that they slept rough in the city centre, and generally spent much longer periods of time roofless. The reasons why young people on Pathway 6 find themselves sleeping rough are summarised below.

Several young people had been forced to sleep rough in the city centre after being evicted from hostels, usually because of their 'challenging' behaviour or because they had not paid their rent. Some of these young people had been labeled 'Do Not

Accommodate' by the HAC and/or other hostels and thus found it very difficult to find another place in the official network.

Some young people had run away before they were 16 and slept rough because if they had approached formal agencies they would have been sent back to home or care. Margaret (17), slept rough for a considerable period before she was 16 and claimed that she had met a lot of other roofless children under 16 in Glasgow city centre.

A few young people slept rough because they did not know about HAC. However, it was more common for young people to become roofless as a result of being refused assistance by the HAC. This was sometimes because they were deemed not to be homeless or to be intentionally homeless, as with Kylie (17) whose story is presented below. In other cases it was because they were 'out-of-towners' with no local connection to Glasgow. Duncan (21), a care-leaver from Paisley whom I met in one of the group interviews, told me that he had slept rough for a while because:

'HAC wouldn't have anything to do with me because I wasn't from Glasgow. If you come under a different district they just leave you.'

Many young people with experience of city centre homelessness told me that these 'out-of-towners' were a large proportion of those sleeping rough there. Most of the young people they mentioned came from neighbouring areas such as Renfrew and Dumbarton, but some came from as far afield as Birmingham and London. As this thesis focuses on the experience of young homeless people from Glasgow it does not explore the issues facing these homeless out-of-towners.

For most young people on Pathway 6, these roofless periods were interspersed with stays in the city-wide network of hostels. They sometimes started off in the young persons hostels and graduated to the adult network as they became older and were perceived as more problematic. One example of this process is George (18):



'I've lived in aw the hostels in Glasgow. Every hostel for young people, and I burnt aw ma bridges wi' them, and then started gettin moved aboot doss houses, and then slept rough.'

Some young people on Pathway 6 occasionally stayed with relatives or friends, but these friends were often other young homeless people who had managed to find somewhere to stay.

Several young people on Pathway 6, such as Declan (19), were caught in a 'revolving door' between prison, rehabilitation centres, hostels and rooflessness. Young people in other groups can find themselves in prison or rehabilitation units, but it seemed that it was the young people homeless in the city centre who were most often moving between these institutions and the streets. They were also the group most likely to be moving between towns and cities. However it should be noted that not all young people on Pathway 6 had travelled outside Glasgow.

Young people on Pathway 6 were the most visible group in the young homeless population. Many of them became involved in the city centre homeless 'scene' which involved sleeping rough on known sites with a group of young people at night, and begging for food, alcohol and drugs during the day. Thus they were clearly in the public eye. However there were some homeless young people in the city centre, including Kylie (17), who deliberately avoided this scene and slept rough alone. Young people on Pathway 6 had usually presented at least once to the HAC, and often presented many times over, and so should have featured in the homeless statistics. Most young people on Pathway 6 were also known to the specialised homelessness agencies which are concentrated in the city centre.

### *Characteristics of Young People on Pathway 6*

The experience of homelessness was simply a continuation of a long history of disruption, insecurity and trauma for most of these young people. They had all suffered physical abuse as children and had spent time in residential care. Most had alcoholic parents and/or very destructive step-relationships. They generally had a severely disrupted education and had regularly truanted from school, often to the point where they were hardly ever there. Most had repeatedly run away

from home or care, and several had developed drug or alcohol dependencies before they were 16, including a couple of young men who began injecting heroin when they were 14 years old. One of these young men, George (18), also became involved in prostitution when he was 14.

Many young people on Pathway 6 were very damaged by their experiences. They often led chaotic lives and were difficult people for public services to work with, and for other young people to live with. They had complex needs relating to their abusive family relationships, drug and alcohol addiction, violent behaviour, psychiatric problems, etc. Several had repeatedly attempted to commit suicide. However, some young people on Pathway 6 had emerged remarkably stable and co-operative individuals given their traumatic experiences, most notably Kylie (17).

Young people on Pathway 6 were the most estranged from their families. They were all angry at their parents because of the way they had been treated, although most still said that their families were important to them. However, a few young people had given up on their parents altogether, like Paul (18) who told me 'they don't want nuthin to do wi' me, and I don't want nuthin to do wi' them.' Only some of the young people on Pathway 6 maintained regular contact with their parents, even then they gained little support from them. However, most of these young people did have some sort of contact with siblings or other relatives, so very few had no family network at all.

The friendship networks of young people on Pathway 6 tended to be heavily concentrated amongst other young homeless people. They often appeared to have little connection with ordinary communities or to people with stable lifestyles.

### *Routes into Pathway 6*

Young people tended to enter Pathway 6 almost immediately on becoming homeless, so they were fairly distinct from the other groups of young homeless people. A couple, like Margaret (17) did sleep rough in their local area very briefly, or like Declan (19) stay in Southdeen, but there was no general pattern of movement from local area to city centre homelessness.



The young people who were living at home generally left or were thrown out when they were 16 as a result of the serious family problems discussed above. Some experienced homelessness even earlier: one young woman, Margaret (17), claimed that she had been thrown out by her mother and had been homeless since she was 13 years old. All of the young people who were in residential care left when they turned 16. They either went back to live with their parents or entered other 'aftercare' arrangements, and they became homeless when these arrangements broke down.

### *Motivations of Young People on Pathway 6*

The key issue is why these young people gravitated to the city centre when homeless rather than staying in their local area. In particular, why they took what appeared to be the unusual step of sleeping rough there. I identified four main reasons for this decision. First, some young people headed towards the city centre to seek the company of a 'community' of rough sleepers whom they already knew from the circuit of children's homes. Second, some were frightened of their parents or other people in their local area and needed to escape from it. Third, under 16 'runaways' required the anonymity of the city centre to prevent being sent back to home or care. Fourth, some were homeless 'out-of-towners' with no local area in Glasgow.

Young people on Pathway 6 generally laid much less emphasis than other young homeless people on locational factors and notions of territory in explaining the motivations for their actions. This seemed to be partly because their time in residential care had drawn them out of ordinary communities into an institutional environment organised on a city-wide basis. Therefore, neither their experiences nor their social networks were confined to a particular geographical area, but were instead rooted, at least to some extent, in the residential care network. Also, the traumatic experiences which many of them had undergone at home often lessened any attachment they may have had to their local area.

However, even among young people on Pathway 6 there were some who expressed territorial sentiments similar to those I found in other groups. For instance, when I asked Margaret (17) how young people were treated by other

young rough sleepers when they first came onto the city centre streets she explained:

'Well it depends where they're fae. Like Maryhill and Possil fight together; like if you're fae Maryhill and somebody fae Possil comes along you're obviously goin tae get done in. That's what happens.'

And George (18) told me that when he gets a house he would like it to be in Drumchapel because:

'I've been brought up here, I know everybody and I can walk about this place fine. To get moved somewhere else, another housing scheme, I wouldnae feel safe.'

But these young people did generally express a much weaker attachment to any local area than other young people, and it seemed that for some that the homeless scene had become their effective 'community'.

### *Routes Out of Pathway 6*

The main route out for these young people, such as Kylie (17) and Roger (19), seemed to be to settle within the official city-wide network (Pathway 5). However, a couple of young people, including George (18), were still on Pathway 6 a year later. One young person, Margaret (17), had managed to move out of city centre homelessness and settle into her own mainstream tenancy, but she seemed to be very much an exception.

### *Kylie's Story*

Kylie's mum and dad brought her up until she was 11. She had three brothers (one older and two younger) and a younger sister. They always lived in the same house in Drumchapel. Kylie stayed with her gran for about a year and a half when she was 11 to keep her company after her grandpa died. She changed primary schools to one in Knightswood where her gran lived. She said that living there was OK because she liked her gran and knew a lot of people in the area. She started high



school in Knightswood before moving back to Drumchapel in the middle of first year. She visited her mum once a week when she lived at her gran's.

Kylie's mum and dad split up when she was 13, just after she came back from her gran's. Her dad moved out but Kylie had always kept in touch with him. Her mum's boyfriend moved in shortly afterwards; he used to live downstairs from them with his wife and children. Kylie said of her mum's boyfriend:

'I didnae like him cause I thought he put ma dad out and I was dead close tae ma da... he was taking part of ma life away and I hated him for it, and I hated ma mum for it as well.'

She had a social worker for most of her childhood because of problems 'at school and at home.' Kylie had many problems at home. She shared a room with her three brothers. She told me that all she had in the room was her bed and 'ma stuff was all in a box at the bottom of the bed and I had one drawer tae maself.' Kylie explained that she was 'growing up and I wanted a room of ma ain.' She couldn't bring friends over to visit; the situation was 'disastrous'. Kylie also said that her brothers were 'beginning tae hassle me and tell me whit tae dae an aw that' and her mum was also really 'nippy' with her ever since she started going out with her boyfriend. She said that many of the problems were caused by her mum's boyfriend 'telling me whit tae dae' and Kylie refusing to call him dad. Kylie also had pictures of her dad up in her room. She said 'they just hated me for it, especially the boys.'

She described her lifestyle at that time as coming in from school and:

'Goin tae the shops, takin the bins oot, daein the dishes, daein ma homework and goin straight tae ma bed likesa 5/6 o'clock as soon as I came in fae school. I hated it.'

Kylie told me that she had to tidy the bedroom every day:

'The boys would make a mess deliberately cause they know I had tae clear it up. Cause half the time I wouldnae do it, like Saturdays and Sundays I was in ma bed aw day if I didnae do whit I was told. Ma wee brothers would bring their pals in and they'd sit and laugh at me and stuff. Gettin worse, and I couldnae handle it anymair.'

Kylie started to run away from home when she was 15 because:

'Him [her mum's boyfriend] and ma mum had been arguing a lot and he'd hit ma mum a couple of times, and I was gettin sick of it and I just kept runnin away. It was just gettin a wee bit too much for me.'

When she first ran away she went to her friend's house, but she got caught because that was the first place that they looked. She also ran away to her gran's quite a lot. She told me of one occasion when:

'I ran away and I went down tae ma gran's and ma ma was really greetin an aw that. An then when I went back up ma ma really kicked ma face in, really battered me. And he [her mum's boyfriend] started threatenin tae hit me. An the boys were just callin me everythin.'

Kylie went into a children's home for a month when she was 15 because 'there had been quite a lot of trouble with me at school.' She had been truanting as well as running away from home. She said that her social worker said 'just see how it goes for a month.' However, Kylie told me 'it just didnae work oot.' When she was in care she got caught sniffing glue and started drinking. She also got called 'goody two shoes' for going to school and so she tranted even more than when she stayed at home. She was then sent back home, but she still kept running away. I asked what sort of childhood she'd had overall:

'Terrible. Uch some of it was good, I had some good times. But whit I remember, most of it, was runnin away, doggin school.'



Kylie left school at the end of 4th year. She passed most of her Standard Grades and said that everyone was amazed that she done so well 'with all the family problems and not going to school an that.'

She left home for good when she was 16. A friend told her about the HAC but they wouldn't take her because her mum said that she could go home. She moved into a friend's place in the Red Road flats - she describes this as 'ma worst mistake ever.' They both went down to Blackburn because her friend knew people down there. They rented a private rented house and Kylie got a job in a hairdressers. After 2 weeks her friend decided that she wanted to come home. Kylie wanted to stay in Blackburn but came back because she didn't want to stay there herself.

When they arrived back Kylie's friend's house was boarded up because she hadn't paid the rent. Kylie explained that they were both trying to live off her friend's money because she didn't have any. They walked into the city centre together. They then split up whilst her friend went to see someone to get try to some money. When Kylie came back to the agreed meeting place her friend had disappeared so 'I was on ma own.'

Kylie again went to the HAC but they told her she was 'barred' because her mum said that she would take her back. I asked Kylie if she had told staff at the HAC about her situation at home:

'I just told them that I was arguing with ma mum, cause I didnae want tae tell them everythin because half of it was still like family business. So I just told them I was arguing with ma mum, I couldnae get oan wi' ma mum because of her boyfriend.'

She seems to have approached HAC several times and each time her mum said that she could come back home. However, when Kylie went to the house her mum wouldn't let her in. She said that staff at the HAC told her:

'There's nuthin really we can do about it, your mum said that she'll take you back, you're intentionally homeless.'

Kylie described one incident when HAC had dropped her off outside her mum's close. She said that she knew her mum was inside and she chapped and chapped the door but her mum wouldn't answer. She went to the police who said 'There's nuthin we can do about it, if your mum's no lettin you in there's nuthin we can do about it.'

Kylie then slept rough for a few months. She was still 16 at this point. She told me that she ended up sleeping rough because 'The Hamish [HAC] wouldn't take me in and I didnae want tae go back tae ma mum's.' She didn't want to go home because she was frightened of her mum: 'One night I threw up I was that scared for what ma ma would say, cause I got a doin one night for runnin away.'

She slept rough in the city centre. I asked why she didn't sleep out in Drumchapel: 'It was too near ma ma.' When I asked whereabouts she slept she said 'Anywhere, in a close or somethin. Anywhere I could find away fae the street.' This was because she was told that if she slept on the street the police would move her on. Kylie didn't sleep anywhere regularly, or with an established group of young homeless people: 'I didnae really trust anybody, cause I didnae really know them.' She said that she mainly slept on her own but sometimes she would 'walk about aw night' with a couple of other girls.

Kylie wasn't receiving any benefits at this time and she didn't beg. She survived by using the soup kitchens in George Square which she discovered by accident one night. She said sleeping rough was 'terrible'. She had nowhere to get washed, was always cold, and went down to under 6 stone. She said that the workers at the soup kitchen did suggest a couple of places she could go but she didn't know how to get there and the HAC wouldn't take her.

Kylie ended up in hospital a couple of times because she collapsed in the street through cold and hunger. The staff at the hospital knew she was homeless but told her that: 'They couldnae help me, I'd need tae find somewhere maself, there's nuthin they can do about it.' They discharged her with a couple of paracetamol.



She said that 'noo and again I'd get the odd place tae stay, I'd see somebody I knew.' She had a boyfriend for some of this time, and his mum didn't know that she was sleeping rough. She used to sometimes have a bath at his house, and occasionally would be able to stay there for a couple of nights.

She told me that: 'I'd fell oot wi' ma family completely at that time.' They didn't know that she was roofless. She would visit her dad now and again and she told him that she was still staying with her friend. She would sometimes get something to eat at her dad's, but she couldn't go up there more than once a fortnight because 'if I went up any more than that there was trouble because ma wee brothers were only allowed to go up once every two weeks.' Eventually Kylie's mum found out that she was sleeping rough and told her dad. He lectured her saying 'You've got a perfectly good place to stay at your mum's and you're sleeping on the streets.' She left in tears and didn't go back to see him for a while.

After Kylie had been sleeping rough for a couple of months somebody told her to contact CCI. They put her up in a hotel for one night and talked to HAC who then agreed to accommodate her. She stayed in the HAC for 2 weeks, and then in Stopover for 10 weeks.

Kylie was then moved to a young persons' hostel on the city-wide network (Kinnaird House). Whilst she was staying there she got a job in a restaurant, but was sacked after 2 weeks for being 'cheeky'. She then got a YT as a chef's assistant in a community centre project.

She moved out of the hostel after a few months to stay with a woman she knew but 'it didnae work oot.' So she went back to HAC and stayed there for a week, before being moved back to Stopover. When I met Kylie she was still living in Stopover and had been working on her YT for 6 months. She was about to move out of Stopover because its closure was imminent.

I was unable to gain any information about Kylie's progress a year later.

## Summary

Previous researchers who have explored the dynamics of youth homelessness have implied that there was one main career through homelessness which most young people follow, with some managing to 'exit' homelessness at various stages while the rest descend into 'chronic' homelessness (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). This thesis has revealed a range of quite different pathways which young people take through homelessness, as defined by the three key criteria of the location and stability of a young person's accommodation and its status as official or unofficial. These pathways are:

Pathway 1: Unofficial homelessness in the local area

Pathway 2: Alternating between the official network in the local area and unofficial homelessness in the local area

Pathway 3: Stable within the official network in the local area

Pathway 4: Alternating between the city-wide official network and unofficial homelessness in the local area

Pathway 5: Staying within the city-wide official network

Pathway 6: City centre homelessness

This framework is dynamic because each pathway represents young people's experiences over a period of time: either the whole of their homeless career or a distinct and significant stage in it. It is important to appreciate that a *dynamic* analysis of homelessness does not simply mean studying the *movement* of homeless people. Stability is also a dynamic concept because it relates to people's experiences over time, and as Clapham *et al* (1994) point out, non-movement is a crucial, and often overlooked, aspect of housing pathways.

These six pathways are not completely separate because some young people, though by no means all, move from one pathway to another at different stages in their homeless careers. The overlaps between pathways have already been mentioned in the sections on routes into and out of each pathway, but it is important to summarise these patterns of movement. The key points are:



- Most young people did spend a short period unofficially homeless in their local area (Pathway 1) at the beginning of their homeless careers. For those who spent a significant period on Pathway 1 the main overlaps were with Pathway 2 and 3, that is, those which involved the official network of accommodation in the local area.
- There may also be some young people, particularly in areas with no local accommodation network, who eventually move onto pathways involving the city-wide network (Pathways 4 and 5).
- The only pathway which overlapped with Pathway 6 (city centre homelessness) was Pathway 5, whereby some young people who had been roofless in the city centre settled into the city-wide network. There was virtually no evidence of young people from Pathways 1, 2, 3 or 4 ever moving onto a pattern which involved sleeping rough in the city centre.

These patterns were sustained in the follow-up exercise one year later (see Chapter 2.3). Hence one of the principal findings of the research was that a sharp distinction can be drawn between local area and city centre homelessness.

Level of attachment to local area was the single most important motivating factor determining the pathways through homelessness taken by these young people. This attachment was strongest among young people on Pathway 1 and generally weakened across the spectrum to Pathway 6, but it was the overriding concern of most of the young people I met. It was based on the three factors discussed in detail under Pathway 1: social networks; familiarity; and territorial boundaries. Many young people on Pathway 1 put up with extremely inadequate housing circumstances in their local area, including sleeping rough, rather than use services elsewhere in Glasgow. Similarly, several young people who were staying in Southdeen (Pathway 3), or moving between Southdeen and unofficial homelessness in Drumchapel (Pathway 2), told me that if this local facility did not exist they would have slept rough in Drumchapel rather than use the city-wide network of hostels. This would suggest that unofficial homelessness is likely to be even more common in areas with no local accommodation services for young

people, as there is no reason to suppose that the 'territorialism' revealed in this research is peculiar to Drumchapel (see Coffield *et al*, 1996).

Young people on Pathway 4 (moving between the city-wide official network and unofficial homelessness in the local area), Pathway 5 (settled within the city-wide network) and Pathway 6 (city centre homeless) were clearly prepared to use services outside their local area. Indeed, some positively wished to escape their home community. However, even among these groups there was still evidence of territorialism, particularly in relation to the gang culture of the city centre homeless 'scene'.

The city centre homeless are the most 'visible' group in the young homeless population, and represent the stereotypical image of youth homelessness so often portrayed by the media. However, my research would suggest that this is only one dimension of a far broader pattern of youth homelessness, much of which is 'hidden' in local communities like Drumchapel. The city centre homeless do not appear to be young homeless people at the 'end of the line', as often seems to be supposed, but are actually a quite distinct subgroup who gravitate to the city centre almost immediately on becoming homeless. Furthermore, whilst one must be extremely cautious about any attempt to quantify a phenomenon in a qualitative study, my research would suggest that it is relatively unusual for young homeless people to decide to sleep rough in the city centre.

The research revealed a strong pattern of local area unofficial homelessness in Drumchapel (Pathway 1). Some young people were on Pathway 1 for only a short period before moving on to a more 'visible' pathway, but for others it was a long-term homeless condition. Therefore it would seem that not all 'hidden' homeless young people resolve their problems, as Hutson and Liddiard (1994) suggest, by moving back home or into their own tenancy. Rather, a substantial number languish unofficially homeless in their local area for considerable periods of time without ever coming to the attention of homelessness agencies. Services for young homeless people concentrated in the city centre will not eventually 'catch' these young people because it is unlikely that they will gravitate to this location at any point in their homelessness careers.



This typology of homeless pathways was developed from an in-depth study of a small sample of young homeless people, and does not elaborate on any previous researcher's work. For these reasons this part of the thesis is best described as exploratory - generating rather than testing hypotheses. Further research is required to develop the framework of pathways and to investigate how widely it may be applied. It is likely that a number of contextual factors will influence patterns of homelessness in different locations, in particular the organisations of homelessness services. A key element in this framework of pathways which I have developed is the centralisation of homelessness services in the HAC. However I believe that this work has provided a basis from which further studies can build a more sophisticated model of youth homelessness.

There were also overarching trends in homelessness careers which transcended these distinct pathways and should be highlighted. My research would support the findings of previous studies that there is a general drift towards institutional accommodation as young people's homeless careers lengthen (Jones, 1993a; Hutson & Liddiard, 1994; Stockley *et al*, 1993). Young people often moved on from unofficial homelessness, for instance staying with friends and relatives, to official homelessness, such as Southdeen or the city-wide hostel network, as it became clear that they were not going to be able to resolve their problems in an informal way.

I found that adult hostels in particular usually featured later in young people's homeless careers. One may speculate, however, that this pattern is mainly due to the increasing age of the young people rather than their length of time homeless. Only those over 18 will be accepted by local authority adult hostels, and voluntary and commercial sector hostels generally have a policy of discouraging under 18s from entering them. Correspondingly, young persons hostels generally aim their provision at the younger age group, particularly 16 and 17 year olds. So, clearly older young homeless people are more likely to be placed in an adult hostel. A few of the young men with whom I conducted biographical interviews had been to prison, and similarly this was in the later phases of their homeless careers. Again, however, this may have more to do with their age than their length of time homeless: the older a young person is the lengthier their criminal record tends to

be, therefore they are more likely to receive a custodial sentence. Nevertheless, I also found a link between homelessness and increased offending which will be explored in Chapter 3.2.

In contrast to previous studies, I did not find a general pattern that young people slept rough for longer periods of time later in their homeless careers (Jones, 1993a; Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). I met several young people who had spent substantial periods sleeping rough when they first became homeless, before they approached and/or received help from public services. On the other hand, I also encountered young people who had gradually become excluded from the official network during the course of their homeless careers and were then forced to sleep rough for long periods. Nor did I find that young people were more likely to be moving around between cities later in their homeless careers. Many of my respondents decided to 'try' another city quite early on in the experience of homelessness. Sleeping rough did seem to be a particular spur which predisposed young people to move to another city, presumably in the hope of alleviating their desperate situation. Overall, young people on Pathway 6, at whatever stage, were the most likely to experience both rough sleeping and mobility between cities.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the central research findings on young people's pathways through homelessness and presented the dynamic typology of youth homelessness developed in this study. The next chapter will offer a fuller account of the findings of the follow-up study on young homeless people's progress across a range of spheres of their lives.



## **CHAPTER 2.3: YOUNG HOMELESS PEOPLE'S PROGRESS**

### **Introduction**

One key question which was posed by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.2 was whether youth homelessness should be understood as a 'downward spiral' (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). Or whether homelessness and 'accommodational instability' tends to be a short-term condition from which young people move on, and should be viewed as a normal aspect of their transition to adulthood (Stockley *et al*, 1993). These process issues have already been addressed to some extent through the framework of homelessness pathways presented in Chapter 2.2. This chapter offers a fuller account of young homeless people's progress across a range of spheres of their lives. It is based upon the follow-up study of the 25 young people who participated in the biographical interviews which was conducted one year after the main stage of fieldwork.

The degree of success I enjoyed in this tracking exercise is detailed in Chapter 1.4. I received 'maximum' information from 11 young people; 'minimum' information about another 11; and have no follow-up information about 3 young people. I generally have least information about the progress of young people in the city-wide network of young person's hostels (Pathway 5).

There were both subjective and objective elements in my assessment of young people's progress. I will discuss the subjective information first before presenting data on the more objective criteria.

### **Young People's Own Assessment of Their Progress**

I asked the 11 young people for whom I had maximum data whether they felt that their overall situation was better, worse or just the same as a year ago. Of these, 8 young people said that they felt that their situation was better than a year ago, 1 said that it was just the same, 1 felt that it was worse, and 1 young person did not give a clear response.

The 4 young people on Pathway 3 from whom I received maximum data were the most positive about their progress. They generally told me that things were much

better than a year ago. The 2 young people on Pathway 1 and 1 young person on Pathway 2 whom I was successful in re-contacting also told me that their situation was better than a year ago, but they were rather more lukewarm in their response. The 1 young person I managed to re-interview from the youth network on Pathway 5 said that life was 'a bit better' than before but she emphasised that she still had a lot of problems to sort out. The 3 young people who told me that life was worse or just the same as a year earlier or did not give a clear response to the question were all young men in the adult hostel network on Pathway 5.

This data clearly does not establish much in itself because the numbers are so small, and also the responses may be unreliable, e.g. people may put a more positive gloss on their lives because they would prefer not to admit to the researcher (or themselves) how badly things are going for them. However, I felt that it was important to offer some flavour of what the young people themselves said about their progress, and it is useful when set alongside the more objective data presented below.

### **My Assessment of Young People's Progress**

I based my judgement of young people's progress on the following criteria:

1. The stability and quality of their accommodation at the time of the follow-up study
2. Experience of rooflessness in the intervening year
3. Their participation in work, training or education in the intervening year
4. Contact with their family of origin at the time of the follow-up study
5. Whether they had formed a family of their own

Young people's experience of rooflessness, employment and family formation are traced over the entire year because these are fairly discrete events which are easily measured and compared. On the other hand, accommodation circumstances and contact with family of origin may vary a great deal over the course of a year so generally only a snapshot is given at the time of the follow-up study. My judgement of young people's progress was also informed by other factors such as



their involvement with drugs or crime, their friendship networks, attitudes to hostel life, etc. There is more data available on some of these criteria than others.

### **Accommodation**

The first criterion is the quality and stability of young people's accommodation at the time of the tracking exercise. I have information on the accommodation circumstances of 16 young people at the point of the follow-up study. Of these, 2 were staying in their own mainstream flat, 1 was staying in Southdeen and 4 were staying in supported scatter flats. Also, 4 young people were staying at their parent's house, 3 were living in an adult hostel, 1 was staying at a friend's mum's house and 1 was in a detoxification unit. None of those I managed to track were staying in a young person's hostel at the time of follow-up; however, as mentioned above, young people in the youth network were the most difficult to trace.

Overall, young people's housing circumstances seemed much the same or a bit better than the year before, but this general conclusion masks strong distinctions between different pathways through homelessness.

The situation of young people on Pathway 3 was by far the most stable. Most of them were staying either in a scatter flat or in the Southdeen Complex on a long-term basis, and one young woman had moved back home in what seemed like a relatively permanent arrangement. Young people on Pathways 1 and 2 were generally still in fairly insecure situations, either living at home or with friends in their local area, although one young man had gone down to England after being roofless in Drumchapel for many months.

I only have information on the whereabouts of one young woman out of the sample on Pathways 4 and 5. She had moved on to a 'training' flat from an intensive support hostel. The others had usually moved on from young persons' hostels in an unplanned way and therefore one suspects that their situation may not have improved.

Young people in the adult network on Pathway 5 were generally still in this very poor and inappropriate accommodation a year later. One of these young men had

been put out of the adult hostel for a month for taking drugs but had since returned. Young people who had experienced Pathway 6 were mainly stuck in adult hostels, or were still leading highly unstable and chaotic lives moving between rooflessness and homeless hostels. However one young woman who had been on Pathway 6 had successfully settled into a mainstream flat in Drumchapel.

### **Rooflessness**

The second indicator of progress was experience of rooflessness in the intervening year. I either have data or can make an educated guess about the rough sleeping experiences of 21 of my sample during that period. I know of only 2 young people who had definitely slept rough since I last interviewed them, but it seems highly likely that another 5 had slept rough during the course of the year. Another 2 just narrowly missed rooflessness by managing to find somewhere to stay in an emergency. I know that 10 young people in my sample had definitely not slept rough in the intervening year, and it seemed highly unlikely that another 2 had slept rough.

This seems to represent a tailing off in rough sleeping because 15 of my sample had slept rough at some point before the first interview, although not necessarily within the previous year. It was mainly young people on Pathways 1 and 6 who had, or probably had, slept rough. Generally speaking, young people on Pathways 2, 3 and 5 had not slept rough.

### **Employment**

The third indicator was participation in work, training or education over the year. I had information about work, training or education for only 14 of the young people. When I carried out the follow-up study 2 of these 14 had a training place, 1 had a part-time job and 1 was doing computer modules as a part of occupational therapy treatment. The other 10 young people were unemployed. Of these 10, 4 had had a full-time job or a training place during the year, and 1 young woman had attended college. Therefore 5 of these 14 young people had engaged in no gainful activity over the year. This progress information emphasises just how limited the employment opportunities are for these young people, and indeed for most youngsters in their neighbourhood.



There seemed to be no overall pattern of improvement or deterioration in young people's employment and training activities over the year. The follow-up information on employment is too incomplete to draw clear distinctions between pathways, except to say that all of the young people on Pathway 3 had worked or attended college over the year but none of those on Pathway 5 or 6 had engaged in these activities.

### **Contact with Family of Origin**

The fourth criterion was contact with at least one parent. I had follow-up information on this for 17 young people, 10 of whom were in contact with their parents and 4 of these were living at home. There were therefore 7 young people who were not in contact with either of their parents at the time of the follow-up study. This is a deterioration from the previous year when out of these 17 young people 16 were in contact with at least one parent. However this comparison may be misleading as this follow-up information was simply a snapshot whereas the biographical data traced these relationships over time, and for some young people this will simply be a temporary fall out or cessation of communication. Again, there were no clear distinctions between different pathways through homelessness except that all of the young people on Pathway 3 were in contact with at least one of their parents.

### **Family Formation**

The fifth indicator of progress is family formation, that is, living with a partner, getting married, becoming pregnant or having children. This indicator differs from the above criteria because whereas gaining employment or secure accommodation would almost certainly be seen as positive developments for these young people, family formation at this age is more ambiguous. To commit oneself to a partner or to have a child whilst still under 20 years old, particularly if homeless and/or unemployed, may seem premature. On the other hand, if young people cope well with these responsibilities this could be viewed as evidence of a positive progression into adulthood. Therefore, this indicator is included not because it gives a clear signal as to how young people are progressing, but simply because it is an important development in their lives which should be noted. Gender is the

most important distinction as regards this aspect of young people's progress rather than pathways through homelessness.

Out of the 10 young women who participated in the biographical interviews I managed to find out family formation information for 7. Of these, 4 young women had had babies or were pregnant, 3 of whom were, or had been, living with their partner. Another young woman had also moved in with a partner in the intervening period. None of the young women had got married. Therefore only 2 of the 7 young women I re-interviewed a year later neither had a child nor had ever lived with a partner. In complete contrast, none of the 8 young men for whom I have family formation information (out of the 15 in the biographical sample) had lived with a partner or were aware that they had children. These family formation patterns are further explored in Chapter 3.1.

## **Summary**

This data would suggest that homelessness is a 'downward spiral' for some young people but not for others. There were clear distinctions in the progress of young people who followed different pathways through homelessness which are summarised below.

Young people on Pathway 3 clearly had the most encouraging progress overall. Their housing and employment situations were much better than the other groups and they also had closest contact with their families. These young people also spoke most positively about their progress. There was a more mixed picture with young people on Pathways 1 and 2: they were sleeping rough less often than before but were still generally in insecure accommodation and had made little progress with employment. There was also some evidence of deterioration in family relationships amongst this group. The limited amount of information I received about young people on the youth network in Pathways 4 and 5 suggested that they left their accommodation in an unplanned way and were still in insecure circumstances.

The pathways through homelessness most closely associated with a 'downward spiral' were the adult network on Pathway 5 and Pathway 6. The particularly



striking point about young men in the adult hostels was that they were much more resigned to hostel-living one year later. This represented an alarming degree of institutionalisation of young men who were still only 20 years old. For instance, Robert (19) told me:

‘It’s easier in here, you’ve got a lot of pals an that. Sure if I got offered a house I’d take it, but I’m not bothered one way or the other.’

It certainly seemed that the longer they remained in this environment the more difficult they would find it to return to mainstream society and ordinary housing.

At this point, I should repeat the usual caveat that I am working with small numbers and this evidence generates hypotheses rather than providing definite conclusions. I should also highlight that there are exceptions to these general patterns and none of these outcomes is inevitable. For example, Margaret (17) who had experienced Pathway 6 had settled into her own house and was apparently doing very well by the time of the follow-up study, whereas Denny (17) who was on Pathway 1 appeared to be in an even more desperate situation than before.

The view I have presented here, based on my empirical evidence, that young people who follow some pathways through homelessness experience more constructive progress than others is not to assert a simple causal relationship. To some extent, these findings are the predictable result of the type of young people who select to take different sorts of pathways, or are admitted by the 'gate-keepers' of resources. For instance, young people on Pathway 3 generally did not have complex personal problems because Southdeen will not accept very vulnerable young people. On the other hand, it is mainly young people with a background in residential care who enter Pathway 6 and they are often very damaged. The relationship between pathways and progress is therefore complex and it may be safest to say that there is an association between certain pathways and a 'downward spiral' rather than to say that some pathways are themselves more destructive than others. However, there were particular aspects of different

pathways which seemed to either aid or obstruct young people's progress out of a homeless situation.

First, the situation of young people who did not receive any intervention from a helping agency (Pathway 1 and some on Pathway 6) seemed to remain much the same or to get worse. In other words, it did not seem possible for most young people to resolve their homelessness informally; they generally needed help from public services. Second, young people's progress seemed to be affected by the type of response they received. Those who stayed in the city-wide network of homeless hostels (Pathways 4 and 5), particularly adult hostels, often seemed to find themselves disconnected from ordinary communities which may make progress out of homelessness difficult for them. It is a pity I did not acquire better follow-up information about young people in the city-wide network of young persons hostels to see how many had escaped from these patterns. What does seem clear, is that staying in a young person's accommodation project in a local community (Pathway 3) provides a useful stepping stone into more stable accommodation for many young people.

It also seemed to be the case that young women moved out of homeless situations more successfully than young men. Out of the 10 young women who participated in the biographical interviews, I was able to form a judgement about the overall progress of 6. Of these, 4 seemed to be doing better than the year before and 2 seemed much the same. None of the young women seemed to be doing worse. In contrast, out of the 15 young men I formed a judgement about the progress of 13. Of these, only 3 seemed to be doing better than the year before, 3 seemed much the same, and 7 seemed worse. This was not really explained by the differing family formation patterns of males and females because the young women who had not had children or moved in with a partner were also doing better than most of the young men.

To summarise, there appeared from my evidence to be three key factors associated with good progress out of a homeless situation:



- remaining in an ordinary community near established social networks and avoiding the homeless subcultures in city-wide hostels and city centre streets.
- receiving competent help from formal agencies as young people have difficulty in resolving their homelessness informally.
- being female.

I would like to end this discussion by returning briefly to Stockley *et al's* (1993) comment that homelessness is a normal and not necessarily problematic experience for many young people. Even those young people in my sample who did manage to move on from homelessness fairly quickly found it a deeply traumatic experience. Young people often used the word 'terrified' to explain how they felt when homeless. They did not view it as a normal part of growing up. I would therefore argue that homelessness is problematic for young people no matter how short-lived, and the provision of services for them is most unlikely to encourage homelessness. With or without such help, they already have strong reasons for avoiding homelessness if that is at all possible for them.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the progress of young homeless people over the period of a year. One factor which appeared important in shaping this progress was gender. The next chapter focuses on more broadly on the relationship between gender and pathways through homelessness.

## **CHAPTER 2.4: GENDER AND PATHWAYS THROUGH HOMELESSNESS**

### **Introduction**

I mentioned in Chapter 1.2 that I had a particular interest in gender issues. My primary concern in this part of the thesis is to examine the impact of gender on young people's pathways through homelessness. However, it is necessary to set this discussion in the context of the wider debate on male and female homelessness. Thus I begin by reviewing previous literature on gender and homelessness before presenting my own data on distinctions between young men and young women's experiences of homelessness.

### **The Gender Debate**

Most of the debate on gender and homelessness has related to the situation of single homeless women. Two main questions are posed:

- How many homeless single women are there in comparison to homeless single men?
- Do the experiences of single homeless women differ from those of single homeless men; in particular, do they deal with their homelessness in more 'hidden' ways?

I should summarise again here the definition of 'visible' and 'hidden' homelessness as these terms are central to the remainder of the discussion (see Chapter 2.1). People can be considered visibly homeless because their homelessness is recorded in official statistics, they are staying in homeless hostels or in contact with specialist agencies, or they are sleeping rough on known sites. Someone's homelessness is therefore 'hidden' if it is not visible in any of these respects. Circumstances which may be considered to constitute hidden homelessness include: staying 'care-of' friends and relatives; sleeping rough away from known sites; living in intolerable housing conditions; or remaining in a



violent or otherwise unsatisfactory relationship because there is nowhere else to go.

I will begin by examining what previous research has established regarding the nature and extent of male and female single homelessness, and, just as importantly, what it has not established.

It is beyond doubt that there are many more visible single homeless men than single homeless women. For instance, Anderson *et al's* (1993) survey of single homeless people in England found that single women constituted only 23 per cent of those interviewed in hostels and bed and breakfast hotels, only 13 per cent at soup runs for the homeless, and only 7 per cent at homeless day centres.

Many commentators have attributed the gender imbalance in these figures to the more 'hidden' nature of female homelessness. For example Daly (1993, p.7) argued that:

'Male and female homelessness are qualitatively different phenomena... They [women] are more likely than men to seek a 'private' solution to their homelessness, by for example getting temporary accommodation from a friend or family member.'

Greve (1991, p.17) comments that women's homelessness goes 'unseen' because 'homeless women are less likely than men to apply for accommodation in hostels.' Again, Watson with Austerberry (1986, p.22) suggest that women's homelessness is 'largely concealed.' Webb (1994, p.28) offers the following explanation for these assertions about the nature of male and female homelessness:

'... if most statistics tend to show that fewer single women than single men present themselves as homeless to their local authority, sleep rough or use hostel accommodation and yet if it appears from both the structural and immediate causes of homelessness that single women are as likely, and in some cases more likely, than other groups in the population to both lose their accommodation

and be unable to secure some suitable alternative, then "where are the single homeless women?"

The anomaly which begs this somewhat crude question has led a small number of writers to conclude that single women 'manage' their homelessness in ways other than those traditionally adopted by single men or families - ways that are less 'visible'.

There seem to be two distinct claims being made here which it is important to distinguish between for the remainder of this discussion:

- First, that a greater *number* of single women than single men are hidden homeless.
- Second, that single homeless women are *more likely* than single homeless men to be hidden, that is, a greater *proportion* of the single female homeless population adopt a hidden route through homelessness.

These claims are based on an *a priori* assumption, which is implicit in most literature but explicit in Webb's analysis, that there are as many homeless single women as homeless single men. The idea being that the 'deficit' of women in the visible homeless population is made up for by the predominantly female hidden homeless population. I now examine the basis for this assumption.

Webb argues that the structural and immediate causes of homelessness affect single women as much, if not more, than single men. However, this is at least debatable. Certainly single women generally have a weaker position in the labour market and lower income than men, and this places them at a disadvantage in the housing market (Watson with Austerberry, 1986; Johnson *et al*, 1991). However, other important factors associated with homelessness may affect single men more than single women. For instance, social isolation is a key feature of homelessness which seems to be suffered more often by single males (Drake, 1994). Women



tend to build up stronger kinship and other social relationships than men (Finch, 1989), which may help them to deal with housing and personal crises in their lives. It may also be that domestic training from an early age enables single women to manage independent living more effectively than single men, and they are therefore less likely to become homeless. Furthermore, it is clear that certain personal characteristics and problems, such as alcohol or drug abuse and criminal behaviour, render individuals particularly susceptible to homelessness, and it may be that single men more often act in ways that jeopardise their housing.

There is also a fairly obvious point which must be made here: there are more single men than single women if we take 'single' to mean without responsibility for dependent children because women head the vast majority of lone parent families (Wilson, 1994). So for there to be as many single homeless women as single homeless men they would have to suffer disproportionately from homelessness.

None of these points are intended to prove that the presumption of Webb and other authors that there are around equal numbers of single men and single women homeless is wrong, but simply to demonstrate that doubts can be raised about the empirical basis for this thinking. Therefore we must seek evidence about the relative extent and nature of male and female single homelessness.

As stated above, it is clear that visibly homeless men greatly outnumber visibly homeless women. As far as I am aware the only substantial piece of research which exists on hidden homelessness is Webb's (1994) study of single women in four local authority areas in Scotland. This research did offer strong evidence that hidden homelessness is a significant problem for single women which far exceeds the scale of visible homelessness amongst this group. On this point Webb's report is supported by earlier research in Glasgow which suggested that the majority of single homeless women either never become 'visibly' homeless or soon retreat into hidden homelessness (GCSH, 1983). However, Webb's research did not explore hidden homelessness amongst single men and therefore could not compare the experiences of both genders. So it cannot conceivably lend support to the argument that women are proportionately more likely than men to be hidden

homeless, nor the contention that overall there are more hidden homeless women than men.

Furthermore, attention should be drawn to one potentially very significant point mentioned in this report. Webb draws most of her sample of hidden homeless women from single women registered on local authority waiting lists as living care-of other households. In Glasgow - the only area for which comparable gender data was offered - Webb (p.131) reported that: 'Almost two-thirds (63%) of the single people living in care-of addresses were men.' Furthermore, 'a higher proportion of single male applicants are staying care-of than is true for single women (86% of men compared with 67.1% of women).' Far from suggesting that hidden homelessness is more prevalent among single women, this data would suggest, if anything, that it is more common among single men.

At this point it may be helpful to summarise what we do and do not know about the relative extent of male and female visible and hidden homelessness:

- We do know that there are more single men visibly homeless than single women.
- We do know that there are many more single women hidden than visibly homeless.
- We do not know whether there are more single men or single women hidden homeless.
- We do not know whether single women or single men are more likely to take a hidden route through homelessness.

The crucial gap in our information is the extent of hidden homelessness amongst single men. The answers to the two key questions posed at the outset of this section depend on how the number of hidden homeless single men compares to the number of hidden homeless single women. The three possible scenarios are presented below.

**Proposition A :** There are fewer hidden homeless single men than women.



This would mean that single homeless women are more likely than single homeless men to be hidden (because a higher proportion of the female homeless population would be hidden than the male). Whether there were overall more single women or men homeless would depend on whether the deficit of females visibly homeless is met or exceeded by the shortfall in hidden homeless men.

Proposition B: There are equal numbers of hidden homeless single men and women.

Homeless women would still be more likely than homeless men to be hidden (because the proportion of homeless women who are hidden would be greater as far fewer women than men are visibly homeless). Overall there would be more homeless single men than women.

Proposition C: There are more hidden homeless single men than women.

This would mean that overall there would be more homeless single men than women because more men would be both visibly and hidden homeless. Homeless women may or may not be more likely than homeless men to be hidden depending on whether the proportion hidden is greater or less than the proportion of the male homeless population who are hidden.

We have very little evidence on which to decide which scenario is most likely. However, what little information we do have (the relative numbers living care-of in Glasgow) points the balance of probabilities to Proposition C.

Nevertheless, even if Proposition C is true it may still be the case that homeless single women are 'more likely' than homeless single men to be hidden (i.e. a higher proportion of this smaller number take a hidden route through homelessness). There are some good reasons why this might be the case. For example, it is well documented that there are far fewer hostel places for single women than for single men (Watson with Austerberry, 1986; Greve, 1991; Dibblin, 1991). This may mean that there is a greater shortfall in female places than male; although this cannot be presumed as it depends upon the relative level of demand. It has also been argued that what hostel provision does exist for single women is highly inappropriate (Webb, 1994). For instance, Greve (1991, p.17)

believes that women are less likely than men to use hostels because they find them:

'intimidating, alienating, and even threatening. The situation is not helped by the fact that the majority of hostels are intended for use by men, and this is reflected in their facilities, daily regime, and style of management.'

Women are more fearful of violence, and particularly sexual attack, than men and this may make them particularly reluctant to sleep out in visible areas or to stay in communal environments like hostels. It is also possible that the stigma attached to hostel living is greater for single women than it is for men (Watson with Austerberry, 1986; Dibblin, 1991). For all these reasons single homeless women may be less likely than men to use hostels and will instead take a hidden route through homelessness. However, this will all remain conjecture until comparative gender data is available on the experiences of single homeless people.

As regards the overall extent of male and female homelessness, it may be helpful to return to the point made earlier about women more often having responsibility for children. Not only do women head the vast majority of single parent families, but such families are much more likely than the general population to be homeless (Greve, 1991). Furthermore, evidence from throughout Europe suggests that a very high proportion of homeless women are accompanied by children (Daly, 1993). It seems to me that homelessness researchers may be looking for their 'missing' homeless women in the wrong place. There may well be as many or more women homeless than men but a great many of them are homeless as part of a family rather than being single. The traditional division in research between single and family homelessness may be preventing a full perspective on women's homelessness to be developed, as the most significant difference in the nature of male and female homelessness seems to be the predominant household type.

One further point should be mentioned following on from the above analysis. It is often said not only that a) homeless women are more likely to be hidden than homeless men, but also that b) single people are more likely to be hidden



homeless than families (Greve, 1991). Even if *single* homeless women are more likely to be hidden than single homeless men, homeless women overall may be less likely to be hidden than men as they are more often part of families.

### **The Age Dimension**

There is also an important age dimension to this debate. To begin with, evidence from Britain and Europe indicates that visibly homeless women are, on average, younger than visibly homeless men (Anderson *et al*, 1993; Drake, 1994). Therefore the proportion of men to women is much more even amongst the young homeless population than amongst the visible homeless population generally.

For example, Anderson *et al* found that two fifths of single homeless young adults in bed and breakfast hotels and hostels in England were women. However, this figure masks a strong distinction between those under and over 18: 53 per cent of homeless 16 and 17 year olds were women but only 35 per cent of 18-24 year olds.

A survey of Stopover hostels in Scotland (see Chapter 1.5) showed that young women accounted for just over a third of all referrals (37%) (SCSH and Shelter (Scotland), 1994). However, in the 16 and 17 year old age group there were almost as many referrals of young women as young men (568 females to 657 males). The gender distinction was far more pronounced amongst 18-21 year olds with 811 young men of this age being referred as compared with only 315 young women.

The 1996 HAC statistics on homeless presentations by young people in Glasgow are remarkably consistent with the research quoted above. Young women accounted for 41 per cent of single applicants aged 16 and 17 years old (319 females to 444 males), but only just over a quarter of presentations in the 18-25 age group (865 females to 2,364 males.)

Therefore the proportion of females in the visible single homeless population is at its height at the youngest end of the age spectrum and tails off very quickly after

age 18. There are at least three possible explanations for this pattern, which are not mutually exclusive:

1) Fewer young women than young men become or remain homeless over 18. Perhaps young women are more successful at resolving their homelessness by returning to their parent's home, finding settled accommodation of their own or moving in with someone else. This explanation is supported by the progress data presented in the previous chapter. Also, young women normally leave home earlier than young men (Jones, 1995a) and so may experience homelessness at an earlier age.

2) Many young women who are homeless over the age of 18 are pregnant or have a child and are therefore not enumerated as single homeless. The high rates of teenage pregnancy amongst disadvantaged young women (McIlwaine, 1995) would suggest that this is likely to be the case.

3) Young homeless women become proportionately more 'hidden' than the young homeless men over age 18. However, as has been suggested earlier, it seems more likely than not that hidden homeless single men outnumber women throughout the age range.

### **Gender Distinctions in Young People's Pathways Through Homelessness**

The importance of age in this debate means that my own data on the topic can only be considered relevant to the young homeless population under 20 years old. As my research was qualitative in nature, no statistical analysis of my sample's pathways through homelessness is possible. However certain trends uncovered by my research, if considered alongside the statistical information presented above, suggest probable hypotheses about the proportions of young men and young women taking various routes through homelessness.

The main gender patterns I identified were as follows. Many more young men than young women had experienced Pathway 1 (see Chapter 2.2 for pathways framework). I found around equal numbers of young men and young women on Pathways 2 and 3. Pathway 4 only contained one young man. As regards Pathway



5, I met more young women than young men in the youth accommodation network, but all of the young people I met in the adult network were young men. Pathway 6 was dominated by young men. The 16 and 17 year olds in my sample were evenly split between young men and young women and the over 18s were mainly young men, which is consistent with the research cited above.

The gender balance on Pathway 1 (unofficial homelessness in the local area) is of greatest interest. This is the most 'hidden' pathway through homelessness and was by far the most common homeless experience amongst my sample of young people. It was also the pathway with the clearest gender split: 14 males (out of 15) and 5 females (out of 10) in the biographical sample had experienced this form of homelessness for at least a short period. Similarly, this local homelessness pattern was far more pronounced among young men than young women in the group interviews.

It could be argued that as many young women as young men take this hidden pathway through homelessness, but they are even more difficult to contact. It is true that the less formal agencies, such as Detached Youth and the Youth Enquiry Service, provided a great many of those on Pathway 1 and they were in contact with more young men than young women (see Chapter 1.5). But for the reasons discussed below, which relate to the motivations of young homeless people, I believe that there are probably more young men than young women on Pathway 1.

First, the young women generally seemed more mature than the young men at this age and were more willing to accept assistance from helping agencies and to work within the rules to gain accommodation. Second, the territorial boundaries which operated to make it so difficult for young men to approach centralised homelessness services seemed a little less daunting to young women. Third, young women expressed less willingness to sleep rough than young men, and fewer had done so in my biographical sample (11 young men had slept rough out of 15, in comparison to only 4 young women out of 10, and two of these had only slept out on one occasion for a single night.) Rough sleeping was seen as even more degrading for a woman, and Pathway 1 involved a fair amount of

intermittent rooflessness. The main way for young women to avoid this was to enter the official network of accommodation.

A couple of tentative conclusions may be offered at this stage, but they would require quantitative research on representative samples of young people to confirm. First, I would suggest that young women are more, not less, willing than young men to approach formal agencies when they find themselves homeless. This means that young men are more likely than young women to be hidden homeless. Second, if the above analysis is sound, it would also mean that overall there are more homeless young men than young women because there are also greater numbers of young men visibly homeless.

These conclusions clearly contradict previous literature which argues that women are more likely than men to deal with their homelessness in hidden ways. However, two important caveats must be added. First, it should be emphasised again that these findings relate only to very young homeless men and women under 20. Second, these gender patterns, as with all aspects of the homelessness pathways, will be affected by contextual factors such as the organisation of homelessness services (see Chapter 2.2). They may therefore differ between geographical areas.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has offered my findings on the impact of gender on young people's pathways through homelessness and has suggested, somewhat controversially, that young men are more likely to be hidden homeless than young women. The next part of the thesis will broaden out the analysis from young people's experiences of homelessness to other aspects of their 'private' and 'public' lives.



## **PART 3**

# **THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIVES OF YOUNG HOMELESS PEOPLE**

## **CHAPTER 3.1: PRIVATE LIVES: THE SOCIAL NETWORKS OF YOUNG HOMELESS PEOPLE**

### **Introduction**

A major chapter in this thesis is devoted to young homeless people's social relationships because attachment to, or exclusion from, social networks is a key element in the meaning of home and homelessness. Social interaction is fundamental to the quality of life for us all, and an understanding of the nature of young people's social relationships is indispensable to an appreciation of their experience of homelessness.

The bulk of this chapter is devoted to an examination of young homeless people's relationships with their family of origin, particularly with their parents. There are several reasons for this focus. First, young homeless people themselves emphasised that this was the most important social network at this stage in their lives. Second, as was explained in Chapter 1.2, I have taken a life course approach in this research and an emphasis on relationships with family (both of origin and of destination) is a key dimension of this approach. Third, and most importantly, family responsibility has been a principal element in the political debate surrounding youth homelessness (see Chapter 1.2). The main theme of the first part of the chapter is therefore the role of young people's parents as the cause of, and solution to, their homelessness. Relations with siblings and wider family are then discussed, before I explore young homeless people's friendship networks. The chapter ends with a review of their family formation patterns.

### **Young Homeless People's Parents**

I have already commented upon the family life and parental relationships of my sample of young homeless under the various pathways sections in Chapter 2.2. In this chapter I will draw together this evidence to explore the role of these young people's parents in creating and resolving their homelessness. However, it must be borne in mind that I do not have the perspective of young homeless people's parents on these issues.



### *Do Young People's Parents Cause Their Homelessness?*

This section will consider the extent to which young people's parents should be blamed for their homelessness. It starts by examining young people's own views on the origin of their problems, and then discusses their relationship with different parental figures and specific problems within the home environment. Gender differences in young people's experiences of parental relationships are then explored, and structural factors, such as poverty and unemployment, which affect these families are highlighted.

#### Origin of Problems

Virtually all of these young people told me that their childhoods were unhappy. Gerard's (17) description of his childhood captured many typical elements:

'Pretty rubbish. Trouble at school, went in tae a home, seen a lot of trouble in the hoose wi' the six of us, ma and da arguing aw the time, shortage of money, never seemed to get anywhere.'

A couple of young people who had suffered severe abuse as children said that they had always had problems; for instance, George (18) told me: 'I've had a bad life since I was a wee boy, since I was really young.' More often young people located the beginning of difficulties in their teenage years. For example, Liz (17) said that she was happy until she left primary school and her problems started because 'I grew up.' For others it was a specific traumatic event which they felt marked the beginning of their troubles. Roger (19), for instance, said that his problems began when his mum died when he was 15 years old, and Craig (17) said 'it all went downhill' for him after he was attacked by his mother's boyfriend at the same age.

Young people sometimes blamed themselves for their problems. For instance, Keith (17) said his homeless situation was his own fault because he 'started taking drugs and stealing, started being cheeky.' They frequently blamed a combination of themselves and their (step)parents for their problems (see also Stockley *et al*, 1993). For example, George (18) explained that if his father had treated him better:

'I would have still been wild, but I wouldnae have been homeless an aw that. I wouldnae have had tae go through care, I probably wouldnae be on the drugs. But whit I dae blame maself for is burning aw ma bridges. So it's me and ma dad.'

A few young people attributed their difficulties to their (step)parents exclusively; these were all young people who had suffered serious physical abuse such as Sandra (18), Craig (17) and Jennifer (18).

Interestingly, only one young person, Roger (19), located any blame for his problems in the political realm, and even here it was combined with personal blame on his father. He told me:

'If it wasnae for him [his father] I wouldnae be here [adult hostel] and if it wasnae for the Government I wouldnae be here. So it's equal parts.'

This replicates the findings of Hutson and Liddiard (1994) that young homeless people usually offered 'individualistic' explanations for their homelessness.

### Parental Structures and Relationships

The discussion of parental relationships in this section is divided into three different types of family structure: intact, lone parent and reconstituted families. This is for two reasons. First, to reflect the political debate on family structures and disruption discussed in Chapter 2.1. Second, because young people in these different family structures have distinct sets of parental figures.

Jones (1993b) found that young homeless people were less likely to be living with both natural parents at 16, and in particular they were far more likely to have a step-parent, than other young people their age. Of my sample of 25 young homeless people, 17 had spent the bulk of their childhood in intact families, 4 had lived mainly in lone parent families, and 4 had stayed mainly in reconstituted families. These figures do not seem out of line with national averages (see Chapter 2.1), but these young people's family structures were often very fluid. For



example, only 7 of the 17 young people from intact families had parents who had never split up for even a short period, and 3 young people from intact and lone parent families had spent part of their childhood living with a step-parent.

I will begin with intact families. These young people generally had difficult relationships with their parents, but they usually had far greater problems with their fathers. There were few examples of overtly affectionate paternal relationships, and only a very small number of young people reported being closer to their dad than their mum. Violence within the home was common and was usually perpetrated by the father (discussed further below). However, some dads exerted an oppressive influence without necessarily being violent. For example, Gerard's (17) father seemed to be the main source of a general paranoia within the family about neighbours, teachers and other outsiders. It was also very common for young people to tell me that their dads were uncommunicative and distant. Liz (17) commented on her father:

'He growls and grunts and moans... To be honest, I don't know why ma mum's stayed with him for 20 years.'

One particular point which emerged was that several young people's fathers had jobs which took them away from home, such as working on oil rigs, in the merchant navy or the armed forces. Only Declan (19) explicitly commented on the impact of this:

Declan: 'My mum brought us up until we were about 7, ma dad was in the army - the RAF. In Germany an all that. He never seen us growing up as babies an all that.'

SF: 'What happened when your dad came back from the army, did things change?'

Declan: 'Aye, that's when he hit the drink an all that.'

Stockley *et al* (1993) noted a disproportionate number of young homeless people came from service families, and suggested that the nature of service life may not appropriately 'train' men for family life. However, reverse causation is also

possible in that men least able to cope with family life, perhaps because of their own troubled childhood, may be attracted into the armed forces.

Most young people had a more positive relationship with their mother, but it was often a complex one. Many of these young people frequently argued with their mum, but there was clearly still a lot of mutual affection and concern in the majority of maternal relationships. For example, Liz (17) left home after rowing with her mother but she made the point that her mum 'was still quite protective even though I'd fell out wi' her.' Jennifer (18) had a very difficult relationship with her mum but nevertheless told me that since she left home: 'I'm just lost without ma mum, she's always been there when I've needed her.' Young people would often argue more with their mum than with their dad, but this was usually because she was the parent with whom they communicated (like the findings of Stockley *et al*, 1993). However, there were also some young people who reported having violent mothers, including Kylie (17).

The above comments on intact families do not relate to a representative sample of two parent households, and concern the most fragile families with the greatest difficulties. However, the experiences of these young homeless people do show how the 'natural' family can be far from ideal. The dysfunction in most of these households stemmed from the natural father, and demonstrates how male 'role models' can be negative influences in children's lives. On the other hand, young people in lone parent and reconstituted families also faced serious difficulties, as is now discussed.

Of the 4 young people in my sample who spent most of their childhood in a lone parent family, all but one was brought up by their mother. Margaret (18) had the poorest relationship with her caring parent. Margaret's mother was an alcoholic who beat her and threw her out before she was 16 years old. The others seemed to have a genuinely affectionate, if problematic, relationship with their caring parent. For example, John (18) told me that he got on 'really good wi' ma ma.' Alan (19) commented: 'ma ma is dead important [to me].' Joan said that she contacted her dad when she was homeless because: 'I know we were fighting, but he would have been worried.'



Nevertheless there were serious problems within these young people's home environments. The first point is that some young people were clearly still suffering from the long-term impacts of family disruption. I asked Margaret (18) why her mother acted as she did: 'I don't know, I think its because of her drinking, cause ma da ran away and left us.' Alan (19) wanted to 'kill' his dad for leaving them and stressed the difficulties his mum faced as a lone parent. The second point is that the absence of a father or mother figure may have a negative impact on some of these young people. Alan admitted that he took advantage of his mum because he didn't have 'a da tae batter me' and said that in a family 'you need a father figure.' Also, the absence of a mother is perhaps what led to Joan's 'domestic exploitation' in an all male household (discussed further below).

I have defined a reconstituted family as one where a new partner moves in with the young person's natural parent, whether or not they get married. All 4 of the young people in my sample who spent most of their childhood in reconstituted families lived with their mother and stepdad(s). There was tremendous friction and conflict within all of these households, and there was a palpable hatred on the part of most of the young people towards their stepfather. For example, Sandra (18) told me: 'I felt like he was trying tae take ower the family. He was trying to be Mr Big, and he wasnae. I still don't like him the noo.' Bernadette (17) described her stepfather as a 'pain in the neck.' Kylie (17) and Jennifer (18), who spent part of their childhoods in reconstituted families, both resented their stepdads for displacing their natural fathers. Kylie told me:

'I didnae like him [her stepdad] cause I thought he put ma dad out and I was dead close tae ma da... I hated him for it, and I hated ma mum for it as well... if it wasnae for him ma mum and dad would still be together.'

This resentment can run in both directions in step-relationships. For example, Joan (18), who spent part of her childhood in a reconstituted family, told me that her stepmum was jealous of her because she was her dad's 'baby'. These young people also had to contend with a shocking level of physical, and in at least one case sexual, abuse from their stepfathers (discussed below).

Relationships with natural mothers within reconstituted families were generally not as negative as with stepdads, but they were still very difficult. Mothers were frequently forced to take sides between their children and their new partner, and young people reported that they usually took their stepfather's side, often, it seems, because they were afraid of him. As Kate (19) told me: 'She just had tae agree wi' him cause he was just such a beast.' Sandra (18) at first told me that she got on 'brilliant' with her mum. However, it later emerged that her mother would often get involved in arguments between Sandra and her stepdad but: 'Whatever I say tae her, she'll just no listen tae me. She'll always side wi' him.' Craig's (17) mum threw him out after he was beaten by her boyfriend, even though he was only 15 years old. I asked how Craig how he felt about his mum's actions: 'Shocked. You expect your mother tae take her ain son before she'd take a boyfriend.'

However, these young people placed a very high value on their relationship with their mother, and in order to preserve it were willing to forgive (if not forget) physical abuse, rejection and lack of support. For example, Craig (17) told me that for the first few months after his mum had thrown him out:

'I really hated her. But then I just started going tae see the baby [his mum and her boyfriend's child], ma wee brother and sister, and then I started talking tae ma ma. But I never, ever spoke tae him. Any time I go doon he always growls at me... It's nuthin tae dae wi' ma ma, it's just between me and him.'

I asked young people in both lone parent and reconstituted families about their relationship with their absent natural parent. There was generally little contact between these young people and their absent parent, and none reported a positive relationship. Sandra (18), for example, didn't know her natural father at all: 'I can't remember anythin about him.' John's (18) dad did not have anything much to do with his children after he left his wife:

'He never wrote letters or nuthin, never sent Christmas cards, birthday cards, nuthin like that ... he disappeared and that was it.'



Margaret (17) had not had much contact with her natural father over the years either: 'He's married noo and he's got his ain five weans so I don't think he's really interested.'

There were several attempts by young people to establish a relationship with an absent natural parent with whom they had lost contact, but these were usually unsuccessful. Joan's (18) attempts to meet her mum were documented in Chapter 2.2. Craig (17) visited his father who lived in Leeds for the first time when he was 15 because his mum gave him some money from a compensation payment she was awarded. However, his father's parents did not make him welcome and Craig told me: 'I just stormed away. You've no seen any of them for your whole life and that's how they treat you.' He hasn't spoken to his dad since.

It was clear, however, that the relationship with their absent natural parent was still important - positively or negatively - to all of these young people.

### Specific Problems

Many of these young people's home lives were dominated by particular problems within the family environment. The most destructive of these factors was violence. Around half of the sample told me that they had suffered physical abuse, and in most, but not all, of these cases the violent parent was the father. These men often beat their partners as well as their children, and a few young people suffered violence from both parents. Some other young people talked about getting 'doins' after particular incidents, such as being suspended from school or being caught taking drugs. It is difficult in these cases to gauge whether this treatment amounted to physical abuse, but I can say that these young people did not seem to have been terrorised by their parents.

George (18) gave the most graphic account of parental brutality. He described one incident when he was 8 years old, shortly before he was taken into care:

'I was in the kitchen making somethin tae eat. He [his father] came in and started shoutin at me, he actually refused me tae eat. Then he booted fuck oot me in the kitchen, I was protecting maself, know

doon there cause he was kickin me, and I picked up a knife and put it right across his stomach, right across his chest. [If I hadn't] I would have been in a worse state than whit I was because he wasnae stoppin that night at aw.'

One of the young women who suffered physical abuse was Jennifer (18). She told me:

'Ma dad like would help me wi' ma homework and his patience snaps after a while, so he used to hit me if I couldnae dae somethin. But ma mum would always jump in and stop him.'

She told me that one night he 'near enough killed me' before her mum intervened. The powerless position of physically abused young people whose non-violent parent cannot protect them is vividly described by Kate (19):

'A few times we would say tae ma mum "Look at my eye" or "That was C [stepdad]" and she'd say "Well, what did you no tell me fur?" And she'll go and say somethin tae him and then he'd start fightin wi' her and come back in and say "Whit you daein, tellin your mum?", then start hittin us again. So we couldnae win. If we telt ma mum she was gettin a doin anyway for sayin tae him. Then we were gettin worse for tellin her. So we'll just have to keep in to ourselves then, we'll just have to take it and that's it.'

Young people who had been the subject of physical abuse seemed remarkably forgiving about their non-violent parent's failure to protect them. For example, I asked George if he was angry at his mum because she did not intervene when his father battered him: 'No because if she had done anythin she would have got the same.' When I asked why she didn't leave and take the children to safety he said: 'Too feart, know whit I mean. I've been feart in times in ma life and I know whit it's like. So I don't blame her.' Only Sandra condemned her mother for taking back her violent stepfather: 'She's stupid, she should just get rid of him.' Some of these young people believed that their fathers had come to regret their violence.



Declan (19) told me: 'My dad is going through a lot of guilt the now... He thinks he can buy us, know whit I mean, getting us things an that.'

Sandra (18) was the only young person to disclose sexual abuse to me. She said that her stepdad had 'tampered' with her since she was 14 years old. She ran away after one incident and when the police found her she told them about the sexual abuse. Astonishingly, they took her home and did not contact the social work department. Sandra's stepdad knew about her allegations to the police and said 'Whit are ye lying fur, I never touched ye.' This caused further disputes and violence within the household and Sandra ran away again a week later and was then taken into residential care. Her mother did not believe that Sandra was sexually abused and remained with her partner. When Sandra returned home when she was 17 years old he did not 'tamper' with her again, she thinks that this was probably because she had 'said somethin.' Sandra has been to court to prosecute her stepdad for this abuse but there 'wasnae enough evidence' as it was just Sandra's word against his. She worries about her younger sister who still lives at home: 'If he has done anythin tae ma wee sister I'll go mental.'

There were 7 young people in my sample who told me that at least one of their parents was an alcoholic, and I suspect that many more of those I met had parents who drank excessively. Even from this small number of cases some of the impacts of parental alcohol abuse can be discerned. Stuart (19) described his mother as: 'Schizo, ma ma's just pure schizo when she's full of drink.' Stuart and his dad were frequently thrown out of the house when his mum came home drunk or they left to get peace because she played 60s music all night and 'talked to people who urnae there.' The violence that some of these young people suffered was often closely linked to alcohol and drug abuse by their (step)parents. For example, Declan (19) told me that his father was violent when he was drunk and added: 'He was still strict wi' us, but I don't think he ever hit us when he was sober.' The sexual abuse that Sandra (18) suffered was also linked to her stepfather's alcohol intake:

'It always happened when he was drunk. Then in the mornin I'd be too scared tae come doon the stairs, but he couldnae remember anythin what had happened cause he'd been that drunk.'

### Gender and Parental Relationships

There were important gender issues which shaped these young people's relationship with their parents. The two main themes which emerged were that parents were much stricter with young women than young men, and expected far more domestic labour from them.

Liz (17) expressed a widely held view that: 'Brothers always get away wi' mair.' This was just as widely acknowledged by the young men as the young women, and they were clear that this parental over-protectiveness was related to the fact that 'lassies get pregnant.' Another important issue was young women's vulnerability to sexual attack. Claire (16) told me:

'If you're oot at night, like if you've got a brother, they don't worry what time they're in at or nuthin. But they're always keeping you [girls] in. Your ma "Aw there's strangers walking about at night, you might get raped." That's the first thing that comes intae their head.'

Coupled with this greater level of protection, there was also apparently a higher standard of conduct expected of girls. Fiona (17) told me:

'I think your mum would feel more let down by a girl than a boy if anythin happened to a girl like gettin pregnant early, or like taking drugs or somethin. Cause there's mair of a link between mother and daughter than there is between mother and son.'

Now to turn to the issue of domestic responsibilities. There was universal agreement that young women are expected to do more housework than young men. For example, Gerard (17) said:



'I think ma ma and ma da thought that ma two sisters were wee helpers for ma mother, that's maybe why they left quite young. But it was like automatic they would help ma ma. Ma brother was the same age as ma youngest sister but he would sit an dae nuthin.'

The origins of this imbalance can be seen in their parents' behaviour: young people almost invariably said that their fathers did absolutely no housework. This was the source of a heated debate in one group interview:

John (18): 'Do you expect them [men] to come in and cook and wash an aw that when they've been oot working aw day?'

Liz (17): 'Do you expect ma ma tae come in and cook and wash when ma da's there? It should be equal.'

John (18): 'What I'm saying is if a woman is no workin then the guy should come in and the dinner should be there for him.'

Sandra (18): 'Ma ma works and ma da sits on his arse, ma ma comes in fae work and makes the dinner.'

John (18): 'I'm saying if a guy's working out there and a woman is sitting in the hoose on her arse aw day then she should make the dinner and that.'

Liz (17): 'Aye, fair enough. But say both are working.'

John (18): 'If both are workin that's different - the daughter makes the dinner.' (laughter)

This argument highlights the persistence of outmoded assumptions about men in full-time paid work and women as housekeepers. Where mothers do have employment then the domestic burden apparently falls on their daughters. However, I did not find any evidence that young women did housework in lieu of dig money. As Vicky (17) told me:

'Ma brother got treated completely different from what I did. It was me that had tae dae aw the hoosework, he pays maybe £10 digs and noo I need tae pay £10 digs but I've still got the hoosework and he doesnae, know whit I mean.'

Similarly, unemployment seemed no more acceptable for females than for males. Young women were expected to work *and* to perform household labour (just like their mothers). This replicates the findings of Jones (1992).

This gender imbalance can lead to a situation of what I have termed 'domestic exploitation'. At least 4 out of the 10 young women who participated in the biographical interviews had experienced this form of abuse, and this was a key factor which drove them out of the family home. Joan (18), whose biography was presented in Chapter 2.2, lived in an all-male household and was perhaps the worst example of these domestic burdens. The excessive and humiliating domestic tasks that Kylie (17) was expected to perform seemed to be a deliberate part of the oppression she suffered at home (also see Chapter 2.2). Geraldine's (16) education appeared to have suffered because she looked after her sister's baby from when she was 14 years old so that her sister could go out to work nightshift:

'Had tae get up and go tae school an aw that, then come home and take the wean again so everybody else could go to work.'

Similarly, Liz (17) was expected to look after her younger siblings whenever her mother was at work. She also had to make the dinner most nights because her mum worked shifts. She told me that her father was very fussy and threw his plate at her one evening because his dinner was 'too greasy'. He did nothing himself to help around the house. Liz told me: 'I just felt that I was being taken for granted.' She explained that her grandmother went into a coma when her mum was 15, and her mum then had to look after the family. So she had no sympathy for Liz and told her: 'I had tae get on wi' it at your age.' It is important to note here that there is evidence that excessive domestic responsibilities can affect young women's physical and mental health (West and Sweeting, 1995).

One final point I would like to make is the relative passivity of young men in comparison with young women when coping with family conflict. For example, Denny (17) told me that when he was getting hassled by his parents 'I just left it cause I couldnae be bothered arguing wi' them aw the time.' In contrast, when Liz (17) felt aggrieved at her mother's treatment of her:



'Everythin I thought just got fired at ma mum. I just told her everythin I thought about her, everythin I thought aboot the hoose, everythin I thought aboot whit I was tae dae in the hoose.'

One might speculate that this more confrontational approach of females, coupled with a more controlling parental style with daughters, may make it more difficult for them to re-integrate within the household. Also, they clearly have less to gain from living with their parents than young men: they have domestic responsibilities heaped upon them and are given little freedom. Young men, on the other hand, have much to gain in being looked after by their mum (and sisters!). This is likely to explain why young men were much more likely to want to return home than young women (see below).

#### Family Poverty and Unemployment

As Donnison (1995) has argued, economic as well as social factors impact upon the family environment of children and young people (see Chapter 2.1). Jones (1993b) found that the parents of young homeless people were less likely to be in full-time employment than those of a national sample of young people, or to have helped them financially in the past year. It is therefore important to highlight the poverty and unemployment which affected the families of my sample of young homeless people.

Only a couple of young people in my research had parents who had possessed steady, full-time work throughout their childhood. Several young people's parents had never worked, such as Stuart (18) and Martin (17), and the parents of most of the others had employment records which were seriously disrupted by unemployment or ill-health. The main source of income for most of these households was therefore social security, although several young people's parents had part-time jobs or worked 'on the side' to supplement their benefits.

These were, therefore, very poor households. However, poverty was seldom mentioned by young homeless people as a serious problem at home. When I asked about money problems, a typical comment was that of John (18) who said that

'things were a bit tight' but they 'got by' and 'there was always food in the kitchen.'  
An exception to this was George (18) who told me:

'When you see weans, they had toys an aw that, I never had anythin like that. None of ma family had anythin like that, it was quite poor in other words.'

There may be several reasons for this lack of emphasis on material factors. First, the serious social and emotional problems that these young people faced at home may have overshadowed money problems in their minds. Second, they lived in neighbourhoods of such deprivation that shortage of money is commonplace and is perhaps not thought to merit any comment. Third, it seemed to me that, despite their willingness to disclose a great deal of personal information about their family life, these young people were ashamed to admit to an outsider that their families were poor.

### Summary

It is clear that most of these young homeless people's problems began long before they became homeless, and that these difficulties were by and large created by their family environments. This is similar to the findings of Stockley *et al* (1993) and Jones (1993b). However, this conclusion does not oblige one to accept a pathological analysis of youth homelessness. It is important to remember that many of the problems identified within young homeless people's families owed their origins, at least in part, to the pressures created by poverty and unemployment in deprived areas like Drumchapel. Also, while these young people's difficult family backgrounds placed them at particular risk of homelessness, it was not inevitable that they would find themselves in this situation. If these youngsters had been given the opportunity of a safe route out of the family home into appropriate accommodation (or support to help them stay there), together with a realistic income, most would have been able to avoid homelessness (see Chapters 4.1 and 4.3).



### *Can Parents be the Solution to Young People's Homelessness?*

This section examines the role which parents may play in resolving young people's homelessness. It begins by considering whether the staying in, or returning to, the family home would offer an alternative to homelessness for these young people, as was argued by the previous Government (see Chapter 2.1). It then explores if young homeless people's families can offer support other than accommodation which may help them to move out of a homeless situation.

#### The Family Home: An Effective Safety Net?

Youth homelessness research has consistently challenged the assumption that young homeless people choose to leave the family home and have the option of returning. Jones (1993b) found that around 60 per cent of the homeless young people left home because of 'family problems', in comparison to only 12 per cent of the nationally representative sample. Almost 90 per cent of the respondents to her homeless survey said that they were not thinking of returning home to live, mainly because they did not get on with people there. Bannister *et al* (1993, p.14) found that the majority of those they interviewed had been thrown out or '...driven from home by intolerable circumstances.' Some of their sample of young homeless people had attempted to return home, but these arrangements always broke down and the young person was again forced to leave. Similarly, Kirk *et al* (1991) commented in the summary of their report: 'Young people do not leave their family home in their mid-teens on a whim but after many difficulties and generally many attempts to remain.' Stockley *et al* (1993) found that arguments with parents and violence were the most common reasons why their sample of young people at risk of homelessness left home, and very few of these young people said that they wanted to return.

The circumstances under which my sample of young homeless people left home, and their patterns of returning, have been discussed in the various pathways sections in Chapter 2.2. My research supports the findings of these previous studies that young homeless people do not leave home 'voluntarily'. They were more often thrown out than walked out of the family home and therefore had no choice in the matter whatsoever. Where they did take the initiative to leave it was to escape continual conflict, or to pre-empt being thrown out. As Roger (19) put it:

'It wasnae as if I wanted tae sleep on the streets. It was just terrible circumstances. It was a position you've got tae say "Whit I'm I gonnae dae?" And I just chose tae sleep on the streets because life was unbearable at home... if you don't need to be there [on the streets], you won't be there ... Sure, there is the odd guy here and there that's left voluntarily, he doesn't have to be on the streets. But he never stays on the street, he always goes back.'

Moves out of the family home were seldom planned by young people: they usually left suddenly, after an argument or a fight. However, this is not to say that they left for trivial reasons or were thrown out by their parents on a whim. The problems which lead to them being ejected or leaving home had usually been around for a long time and they had just reached a point where the situation could no longer be sustained. Young people were usually evicted in the midst of continual conflict about their unemployment, lack of dig money, fights with siblings, criminal activities, or involvement with drink and drugs. The smaller number who walked out left to escape continual arguments with parents or siblings, domestic exploitation, or physical and emotional abuse.

Some of these young people could be said to contribute to their predicament in the sense that their own behaviour, such as involvement in crime or drugs, was, at least in part, what lead to them being thrown out of the house. However, ample reasons for such behaviour can be found in their childhood difficulties discussed in the previous section of this chapter.

It is clearly not the case that these young homeless people were tempted out of the family home by generous social security benefits or the prospect of council housing. In fact, the lack of social security benefits for 16 and 17 year olds is partly what drives these young people out of the family home because they cannot contribute to the (already overstretched) family budget.

Now to turn to the issue of returning home. Of the sample of 25 young people, 14 had returned home at some point. Sometimes young people were accepted back into the family home on an explicitly temporary basis. More often there were



several unsuccessful attempts to return home on a permanent basis, and some young people were repeatedly thrown out or left their parents' house for the same reasons. So far from resolving their homelessness, returning home just took these young people back to square one and further damaged their relationship with their parents. As young people in one group interview told me:

Gerard (17): 'Nae use goin back cause it aw starts aw over again.'

Joan (18): 'It's just a vicious circle, it keeps goin round and round and round.'

There may be exceptions to this. At the time of the follow-up interviews, Liz (17) did seem to have made a successful move back to the family home and had been living there for almost a full year. She explained that she had 'compromised' with her parents and they had given her more freedom and did not expect as much domestic labour from her.

Most of the young people I met who were not living at home did not wish to return. The main reason was that the problems which drove them out in the first place were still present. Young people also wanted to put a stop to the 'in and out' pattern which got them nowhere. Alan (19) told me:

'It's been about 4 or 5 times I've been back in the hoose and oot again, so I feel I'm gettin old enough to say, no, should make that decision for maself and I don't need to go back tae ma ma.'

Other young people put stress on the independence they had acquired since leaving home. Sandra (18) summed up many young people's feelings when she said that she didn't want to go back to her mum's because: 'I feel that I've got used tae ma freedom. Plus I get on a lot better wi' ma ma noo I don't stay wi' her.' This improvement in relations between young people and their parents after they leave home is explored further in the next section.

However, several young men did express a desire to return home, whilst at the same time acknowledging that for various reasons it was impossible to go back

(like the findings of Kirk *et al*, 1991). Ken (22) explained why: 'It's a relief, that's you back in your ma's. Clean clothes, three meals a day, snacks whenever you want them.' This domestic care was partly what made Stuart (18) keen to remain living at home, as well as the fact that his mother sometimes subsidised him: 'it's cushy doon there, don't always have to pay dig money.' Craig (17) told me that he hadn't wanted to leave his mum's house and would like to go back because:

'I just miss that feeling of being in the hoose, know how you're a proper family. But I cannae when he's [his stepfather] in. We just growl at each other.'

Only a few young people thought that they would be allowed to return home if they wanted to, and a couple of other young people's parents had offered to let them come home on certain conditions. For example, Ricky's (17) mum said he could come home if he got a job or YT, and Declan's (19) parents said he could come home if he stayed 'clean' of heroin. By and large, however, young people did not seem to have the option of returning home on a long-term basis.

So the overall conclusion must be that remaining in, or returning to, the family home is not a feasible solution to these young people's homelessness.

### Parents As a Source of Support After Leaving Home

As, Stockley *et al* (1993) emphasised, the fact that young homeless people do not wish to return home to live should not be confused with them not wanting a relationship with their parents. There was generally a very high level of contact between the young homeless people I interviewed and their parents. Out of the 25 who participated in the biographical interviews, 16 were in contact with at least one parent frequently, that is more than once a week, and many saw their family daily. However, almost all of these young people had lost contact with their parents for a short period, usually just a few weeks after the argument which had caused them to leave home. Only 2 young people had no contact at all with their parents: Margaret (17) and Dougie (19). In addition, there were 7 young people



who had re-established contact with their parents after lengthy periods of estrangement, but these relationships still appeared fragile. Young people who only had contact with one parent were usually, but not invariably, in touch with their mother.

The key point which was emphasised by most of these young homeless people was the dramatic improvement in their relationship with their parent(s) after they left home (like the findings of Kirk *et al*, 1991 and Stockley *et al*, 1993). Ricky (17) explained that he got on 'a lot better' with his mother because 'the pressure's off... a weight has been lifted off both our shoulders.' Similarly John (18) told me that: 'I'm no on her [his mother's] back all the time, she's no on mine so it's alright. There's nae arguing noo, it's better.' Or as Craig (17) put it: 'See when you're [living] wi' your ma, just fight wi' her. But see when you just go in for an hour you talk tae her - brand new.'

It was emphasised by young people in several of the group interviews that this improvement in the relationship came about when they had secured a place of their own rather than when they were still homeless:

Sandra (18): 'See when you've got a permanent address you get on better wi' them instead of them saying "Where are you staying the night? Worrying about you.'

Liz (17): 'They know where you are.'

John (18): 'They know you're no...'

Sandra (18): 'Gettin intae any mischief.'

John (18): 'They know wi' a hoose you've got tae be a bit sensible.

Ye cannae just muck aboot, they know you must be daein awright if you're surviving.'

It must also be noted that there were young people whose relationship with their parents remained very poor after they had left home. However, even these young people tended to have mixed emotions about their families. As Roger (19) said of his father: 'He's ma dad and I love him an that but I hate the guy an all.' The relationship was still important to him: 'I don't know why but it is, he's ma dad, it's

as simple as that.' Even Dougie (19), whose parents had completely rejected him, told me:

'I want tae get back wi' ma parents... I wouldnae like tae live wi' them, but I'd like tae get back in contact wi' them... there are lots of times when I'm down... I just get fed up wi' ma family goin through ma mind.'

The main point to emerge here is the importance young homeless people attach to a good relationship with at least one parent, and how leaving home and moving into a secure home of their own can preserve and strengthen these relationships. As Jones (1995a, p.90) has commented: 'Leaving home can lead to the improvement of a parent-child relationship, rather than represent confirmation of its deterioration.' It is not surprising that young people get on better with their parents when they leave home: that is probably the experience of most of us. However, one must bear in mind the enormous stress these households are under. These young people's desire to leave home is not simply a self-indulgent preference, but a clear necessity if these fragile family relationships are to be sustained.

We should now consider the support these young people received from their families as they tried to cope with homelessness or set up home. While there were a small number of young people who appeared to have received no family support since leaving home, the majority had received some kind of assistance from their parents. This is similar to the findings of Bannister *et al* (1993, p.19) that: '..many [young homeless people] still rely on family contacts for a modicum of financial support and advice.'

It was most common for my sample of young homeless people to be given emotional support by their parents. When I asked young people who they would turn to if they had a problem or needed someone to talk to, more than half of my sample said that they could turn to one of their parents; usually, but not always, their mother. Financial and material help was also fairly common, with about half of these young people's parents giving them loans of money or gifts in kind such



as groceries or dinner. For example, John (18) told me that his mother often gave him money and told him: "'Just gimme it back when you've got it.'" So when I get crisis loans I try and gie ma ma some of it back.' Similarly, Kate (19) told me that her mother has: 'Helped me oot in every way, like she'll come wi' a bag of messages for me or somethin.' In material terms, this support usually consisted of very small amounts of money or modest gifts in kind, but this help was often crucial to these young people just managing to survive on a tiny income. One should also bear in mind the limited income of most of their parents, hence the sacrifice which may be involved in helping their child out in this way.

It was reported in Chapter 2.2 that young people who slept rough in their local area were often given some help by their parents, such meals and baths. However, young people's parents seemed to be more willing to help them out with more substantial material support once they had a stable home of their own. For example, Fraser's (19) parents had helped him furnish and decorate his house: 'See if it was doon tae me, just me withoot ma ma and da, I'd have nuthin in the hoose.'

Young people who were fortunate enough to have some support from their parents were very grateful to have this 'safety net'. However, some young people who gained financial support made it clear that they didn't want to depend on this help too much. For example, John (18) told me:

'I'd rather stand on ma ain feet. When I dae need money I just go up and she gies me it, but I try no tae... I'll need tae stand on ma ain two feet one time, so I may as well dae it the noo instead of scrounging aff ma ma aw the time.'

A significant point, often neglected, is that young people themselves can be an important source of support to their families. The domestic support which young women gave their families was discussed earlier, and this often continued after they left home. There were also some reciprocal arrangements for loans of money between parents and children (see also Jones, 1992). For instance, Gerard (17) told me:

'If I ever have tae borrow money till ma next giro day I always get it aff ma ma, and sometimes she gets it aff of me; so we're awright. We seem to help each other money-wise.'

Liz (17) told me that her mother sometimes loans her money, but more often she gives her mum some money to 'see her through to the end of the month.' Therefore the maintenance of these supportive relationships can be crucial: not only for the young people, but also for their families.

As has been discussed in Part 2 of the thesis, there was a clear association between pathways through homelessness and quality of relationship with parents. Young people on the local area pathways (1, 2 and 3) had much more frequent contact with, and received more support from, their parents than those in the city-wide pathways (4, 5 and 6). Whilst it is probably true that those who get on better with their parents are more likely to choose a local area route through homelessness than those who have particularly difficult relationships, there is little doubt that these supportive kin networks are encouraged by young people remaining physically close to their parents.

### Summary

It has been made abundantly clear by this and other studies of youth homelessness that very few of these young people could have remained living at home. Where they have attempted to return to the family home their relationship with their parents has generally deteriorated further. The simplistic notion of the family home as the solution to youth homelessness is therefore insupportable.

However, a good relationship with at least one parent (usually but not invariably the mother) remained very important to these young people. These relationships usually improved dramatically once the young person leaves home, particularly if they manage to establish a stable home of their own near their parents so that they can maintain a high level of contact. In this situation these family bonds are often strengthened and young people and their families may be able to offer each other valuable mutual support. This family support may be crucial in enabling young people to progress out of a homeless situation into a stable and socially integrated



lifestyle. It should also be recognised, however, that for some young people relationships with parents may be unsalvageable in any form.

### **Siblings and Wider Family Networks**

All of the young homeless people in my sample had at least one sibling. Several had half-siblings within the household, but none had ever lived with step-siblings. Like most children, virtually all these young people reported arguments with their siblings when they were young. However, for a few young men, including John (18) and Alan (19), these disputes led to violent fights with their brothers which were one of the main reasons why they left home. It was quite common for young people's older siblings to return to the family home when they had fallen out with their partner, and they were sometimes accompanied by small children. This often created further tensions in an already difficult, and overcrowded, household. As Joan (18) said of her brother: 'He's been away and back I don't know how many times.'

However, apart from parents, siblings were almost invariably the family members with whom young people had the closest relationship. Virtually all of these young people maintained contact with at least some of their siblings, and most paid frequent visits to the ones who lived locally. Several young people, for example Craig (17), continued to visit their family home even when they had a very poor relationship with their parents in order to see their younger brothers and sisters. Dougie (19) was upset at being unable to visit his siblings because his parents had cut all contact with him: 'I've got brothers that I miss... I don't even know if there's anymair.'

As was reported in Chapter 2.2, older siblings were almost always the first people from whom young homeless people sought accommodation. As Liz (17) told me:

‘[You turn to] your closest family, like your brothers or sisters. They're the ones who are going to turn round and say: “I cannae turn away ma brother or sister.” But eventually they have to due to circumstances.’

One difficulty was pressure from young people's parents. As Sandra (18) explained:

'Like if your no really gettin on wi' your ma and da, they're gonnae turn roon and say [to your siblings]: "Whit you keepin them fur?"'

Problems also often occurred when the young person's sibling was living with a partner. Gerard (17), for instance, told me: 'I stayed wi' ma sister but I moved oot because it was her boyfriend: I don't think he was too happy wi' me being there.' Young people were generally self conscious about getting in the way if they stayed at their sibling's house. For example, when John (18) stayed with his brother and his wife he felt awkward because:

'You always thought they were fighting because of you... at that time I thought they never wanted me there but they did, it's just the way I thought.'

Young people often made the comment that their siblings had 'their ain lives tae lead', and they went to some lengths to respect their privacy. For example, Stephen (22) who stayed with his sister and her boyfriend told me: 'I try to stay out the house as much as possible to give they two as much freedom as I can.'

However, young people often faced a lack of privacy themselves when they stayed in their sibling's house. For example, Robert (19) explained that when he lived with his brother and his wife he had to sleep in the livingroom. This meant that he had to stay up every evening until everyone had finished watching TV before he could go to sleep. He also described wandering the streets at night just to get away from them. Young people were also distressed by the lack of control they had when they stayed in their sibling's home. As Jon (18) said: 'Even if they're wrong in an argument - "It's ma hoose."' On the other hand, several young people admitted that they had abused their sibling's hospitality by, for example, coming home very late or frequently getting drunk. Fraser (19) had stayed with two of his brothers and told me: 'I just abused it and ended up fuckin having tae get ma ain hoose.'



As well as accommodation, some young people gained other forms of support from their siblings while living with them. For example, Stephen (22) described being cared for by his sister: 'She does ma washing, she makes ma dinner, I cannae complain.' However, only a few young people mentioned receiving material support from their siblings when not living with them, such as money or groceries, and they seemed more reluctant to accept such from them than from their parents. For example, Denny (17) told me that his siblings offered him money but 'I don't take it.' As Finch (1989, p.45) has commented, people probably feel less of a sense of obligation to assist siblings than children, and much depends on 'personal circumstances and personal liking.'

One further point that should be noted is that many young homeless people had siblings who had also been homeless. Out of my sample of 25 young people, 3 were from the same family (Declan (19), George (18) and Geraldine (17)), and another 4 young people mentioned that their brothers or sisters had been homeless. It may therefore be a common pattern that homelessness 'runs' in families, and helping agencies should be alert to the needs of homeless young people's younger brothers and sisters.

Generally speaking, family relationships other than with parents and siblings seemed to be of little significance to these young people. They rarely stayed with members of their extended family when they were homeless: only two young people had stayed with an aunt and another young person had stayed with a cousin. A few young people mentioned contact with aunts and uncles but only one young person, Joan (18), specified her aunt as someone she could rely on to help her. I was surprised that there was very little mention of contact with grandparents, and no young person reported support from this source.

It may be that where there are serious problems within a nuclear family, relations with the wider family can become very strained. This was the experience of Kate (19):

'None of the family would come near us because they knew what was happenin, they knew that ma mum and her boyfriend were

taking drugs. They thought that's the kind of life she wanted to have so they didnae bother wi' us.'

This severing of extended kin relationships can leave children very isolated and vulnerable.

### **Friendship Networks**

The nature of these young people's friendship networks differed significantly depending on which pathway through homelessness they took (see Chapter 2.2 for pathways framework). Young people on the local area pathways (1, 2 and 3) tended to have long-standing friends from childhood (some of whom may also have experienced local area homelessness). On the other hand, the friendship networks of young people on the city-wide pathways (5 and 6) tended to be concentrated amongst other homeless young people in a similar position to themselves.

I will focus first on the friendship networks of young people homeless in the local area. Most had stayed with friends (usually their friends' parents' houses) as part of their homelessness pathway, but there was a marked reluctance to do so and a clear preference for staying with family whenever possible. Young people told me that they found it 'embarrassing' staying with friends for two main reasons. First, there was a sense of 'intruding' in other peoples homes, as Alan (19) explained: 'You just feel oot of place.' This sense of 'getting in the way' seems to be felt even more keenly when staying with friends than with siblings - young people felt that they had even less of a 'right' to be there. Second, young people were acutely conscious of being a drain on the resources of the host household by, for example, taking food or using hot water, when they couldn't offer to pay dig money. Many young people told me that the worst thing about staying with friends was the 'embarrassment of taking meals' from their mothers. Similarly, young people disliked taking support in the form of money from their friends. As Denny (17) told me: 'If I really need it I'll ask them for it but I don't like taking it.' When I asked Kate (19) if she could rely on her friends for material help told me: 'Like I couldnae go tae pals an that... money or somethin I couldnae, it would have tae be ma ma.'



Young people generally only felt able to accept material help or accommodation from their friends on two conditions. First, this reliance had to be short term. As Ken (22) told me: 'Cause you've relied on them for so long, there comes a time when you're like that "I cannae ask them again."' Fraser (19) told me that 'you would know when you had overstayed it' and for this reason he often moved on from someone's house after staying a couple of nights even if he had nowhere else to go. Second, there was a notion that these debts had to be repaid or reciprocated. For example, when I asked Stephen (22) if he could turn to his friends for help he said: 'You couldn't rely on them aw the time, you'd have tae try and dae somethin tae earn it.' Several young people, including Jon (18), made the point that they always repaid money they borrowed from friends, and a couple of young people admitted that they sometimes stole to meet this obligation.

There was also another side to these relationships which a few young people highlighted: friends could be exploitative as well as supportive. Ken (22) related his experience: 'At first when I got ma own flat some of ma pals tried to treat it like a doss house, till you put your foot down.' Fraser (19) had similar problems: 'They think they can come in and dae what they want, any time they want.'

I would now like to consider the friendship networks of young people on the city-wide pathways through homelessness. Some of these young people, for example Declan (19), had been in residential care for most of their childhood and therefore their friends were already mainly young people vulnerable to homelessness. However, most of this group went through a process of losing their old friends and replacing them with young people they met through hostels or through the city centre homeless scene.

Kylie (17) exemplified this process. She told me that since she has been homeless: 'I've fell oot wi' a lot of pals because I huvnae been able tae go up and see them wi' being up the toon - it's too far a distance tae walk.' She went on to say that: 'I've made a lot of new pals since then', and these were young people she met in youth residential projects. Similarly Roger (19), who was staying in an adult hostel, told me: 'I had pals until I became homeless, and then it was just a case I had tae move away so I never really got tae see them.' One should remember how quickly

everyone gains and loses friends at this young age, and interrupting contact with friends even very briefly can be enough to sever these relationships. Also, young homeless people often cannot afford busfares to visit friends, and do not have ready access to a telephone, so even relatively short distances can be enough to break up friendships.

Not only do young people have difficulty keeping up with old friends, there is also often a change brought about in the relationship by the young person's experience of homelessness. Duncan (21), who had been roofless in the city centre, explained that: 'The problem wi' old friends, if they've never been through the situation [homelessness] they can't relate to it.' George (18) who had also slept rough in the city centre told me:

'The mates I grew up wi', most of them have got their ain hooses noo and have got their lives sorted oot. I class them as arseholes noo. And the people that I meet up the toon that are homeless, I class them as good mates. Noo I'm homeless I'm a different class fae all the mates I grew up wi' and went tae school wi'.'

One exception to this pattern was Alan (19). When I asked if many of his friends were homeless he said: 'No, no really, I've still got ma secure mates fae Castlemilk... they're aw sorted [with jobs and houses].' However, he was the only young person on Pathway 4, that is moving between local area homelessness and the city-wide network of hostels, and thus still had links with his own community.

I explored the nature of friendships between homeless young people. Margaret (17) was the young person who most emphasised the help roofless youngsters gave each other: 'We would help each other out, buy each other drink, share our money.' She explained that when she was sleeping rough in Glasgow city centre a group of around fifteen roofless young people went about together. They split up through the day to beg on different 'patches' and then they would meet up at night and:



'The person that made the most money, they buy the carry-out for everybody. And the ones wi' less money, they'd buy somethin tae eat.'

However, there were clearly limits to the help these young roofless people could offer each other because of the dire straits they were all in:

'Well half of them were younger than me, half of them are about 13/14. Some of them were older but they were begging as well and they had nae money. Some of them got giros, but they would just waste it aw.'

Friends who were homeless did offer the advantage over non-homeless friends that they understood what the young person was going through and did not stigmatise them because of their experiences. However, there were clear drawbacks to friendships with other homeless young people. These relationships, particularly amongst roofless youngsters, were usually very transitory because of the mobility of the young people involved. Duncan (21) told me:

'I never had any friends when I was sleeping out because from one day to the next you wouldn't know if the same person would be around. That's what I found anyway. One would go one place, one go another, Edinburgh and Manchester, just moved on.'

Also, young people on the city-wide pathways stressed the exploitative nature of some of these friendships - particularly when they got their own house. Margaret (17) told me: '[Some friends] think it's a doss house to sit about wi' their pals.' Paul (18) added 'A lot of your mates would try to take advantage of the situation.'

Many of the young people on these city-wide pathways were disparaging about the friends they made on the streets or in homeless hostels. Roger (19) told me that he felt lonely whilst sleeping rough even though he was with people because they were usually drunk and he didn't feel he could speak to them. Dougie (19) said that he had made some friends in hostels '...till you find out half of them are

junkies; you walk away.' Alan (19) wrote off most of those he met in hostels as 'pure idiots' and told me that he wouldn't associate with them once he left the hostel scene.

It is of course natural to change friends at this transitional stage of life, as you leave school and start work and/or move away from home. However this replacement of young people's friends from their local communities with an entire set of homeless friends is concerning. This is not to suggest that homeless young people aren't worth knowing or can't be good friends, but simply that once a young person's effective 'community' becomes the homeless scene this is likely to make it more difficult for them to re-integrate into mainstream society.

### **Family Formation**

In Chapter 2.2 I summarised the family formation patterns amongst my sample of 25 young homeless people. To recap, none of the 15 young men had ever married, lived with a partner or were aware that they had a child when I first interviewed them. This position remained the same for the 8 young men for whom I gained family formation information in the follow-up study one year later. The family formation patterns of the 10 young women I interviewed provided a complete contrast. By the time of the follow-up study, 4 of the 7 young women for whom I received family formation information had given birth or were pregnant, 3 of whom had been living with their partner. Another young woman had also moved in with a partner in the intervening period. Many other young people I interviewed, both male and female, said that they had a boyfriend or girlfriend. Some of these relationships were relatively long-term, whereas others were very short-lived.

I would now like to explore the attitudes which underpin these patterns. To begin with, one may speculate that there is a tendency for these young people to become more involved with partners than they otherwise would at this early age because of the problems they face with other relationships in their lives. For example Kate (19) said of starting to go out with her boyfriend: 'At that time I needed somebody there to care about me. An that's when I met Jim.' Similarly Sandra (18) told me that she had been going out with her boyfriend for 2 years and she liked having



him around: 'Knowing that there's someone there who I know will look after me.' She told me that they were supposed to get engaged on her 18th birthday but she had changed her mind. Denny (17) mentioned in passing that he was engaged to a girl he had been going out with for 8 months, but he barely spoke of her again throughout the rest of the interview. Jennifer (18) told me that she had already been engaged twice; once at age 16 and again a year later to a different boy. These partners seem to occupy little prominence in these young people's lives, and yet engagement to them is perhaps seen as a way of establishing a positive emotional bond.

Another point which struck me was that several young people who had particularly traumatic pasts seemed attracted to other young people whom they perceived as having had similar experiences. For example, George (18) told me that he and his girlfriend 'get on brilliant' and this is partly because she 'has had a lot of problems as well.'

Whilst some of these young women seemed to be using relationships with men as a means of gaining emotional security, I found little evidence that they saw them as a route out of homelessness. Only Geraldine (16) had moved in with her boyfriend. The other young women who had lived with a partner had let their boyfriends move into their house.

It seems likely that some of these relationships are abusive, however the only young woman who disclosed violence by a partner was Margaret (17). She fell out with the father of her child whilst she was pregnant because:

'He was a junkie, he kept beating me up an aw that. I had tae get rid of him, he kept taking money off me for drugs and giving me black eyes an aw that.'

More positively, a couple of young men who had long-term girlfriends by the time of the follow-up interviews, John (18) and Stuart (18), said that they were less involved in petty crime because of the influence of these young women. Stuart (18) explained: '...being wi' her has calmed me doon a lot, we are pretty close.'

A particular problem faced by the young men who lived in all-male adult hostels was their lack of contact with women. None of them had a girlfriend, and as they became increasingly cut-off from mainstream society and their confidence ebbed away, their prospect of forming partnerships seemed ever more remote. Thus another important aspect of their transition to adulthood was impeded by their homeless situation.

We now turn to the issue of pregnancy and children. There is a popular argument that young women deliberately get pregnant to acquire council housing or social security benefits. However, Greve (1991) has pointed out that there is no evidence to support this position. I considered the likelihood that the 4 young women I met who were expecting a baby or had a child by the time of the follow-up study had deliberately become pregnant for these reasons, but it must be stressed that I did not actively pursue this point in the interviews. Joan (18) and Kate (19) were already settled in their scatter flats when they became pregnant. Bernadette (17) had an unplanned pregnancy, and was due to move into a training flat before she found out about her condition. It seems unlikely, therefore, that any of these young women had a housing purpose in mind when they got pregnant, although this does still leave the issue of social security benefits. Margaret (17) said that: 'I had to get pregnant before I could get a furnished flat.' But she did not make clear whether she had got pregnant with this goal in mind.

Vicky (17) commented in one of the group interviews that: 'There are lassies falling pregnant just to get a house.' However, the young women in this group did not condemn these girls for getting pregnant, but rather the system for putting them in that position. Karen (17) who participated in the group discussion did have a baby and said that she found it easier as a pregnant woman to get a house and benefits 'without much hassle.' However, she insisted: 'I'm not saying that I done it as an easy way out.' In another group discussion Duncan (21) said: 'It happens [young women deliberately getting pregnant], but it shouldn't happen, it's society.' Caroline (17), however, argued in the same group that:

'I don't think it happens as much as everybody thinks it does. I don't think a lot of people go out and say "Right, you'll do, let's go and



have a wee bit of sex so that I can get pregnant, so I can go and get a crisis loan” ... I don't really fancy goin oot and getting pregnant at ma age just so I can get money.'

I would speculate, on the basis of the limited amount of evidence I have on this issue, that these disadvantaged young women become pregnant not as a deliberate act, but rather as the result of not really caring one way or the other. For example, when I asked Kate (19) about having further children she told me: 'If it happens, it happens, cause that's the way it happened the first time.' This is a similar fatalism to that I encountered amongst young unemployed men about going to prison (see Chapter 3.2): the common thread is a sense of hopelessness about the future.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the 'private' sphere of young homeless people's social networks: their relationship with their family of origin; their friendship networks; and their family formation patterns. Chapter 3.2 aims to complete the picture by focusing on the more 'public' aspects of their lives, particularly their contact with the labour market and official agencies.

## **CHAPTER 3.2: PUBLIC LIVES: YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE OF SCHOOL, WORK AND PUBLIC SERVICES**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores young homeless people's 'public lives'. It begins by examining their experience of school and their transition into the labour market, which involved, for almost all of these young people, contact with the benefits system. The remainder of the chapter reviews their experience of a range of public services, in particular housing and social work agencies.

### **School and Education**

All but 3 of my sample of 25 young homeless people left school as soon as they could at the end of 4th year. Of these 25, 14 left school with no qualifications at all. There were 11 young people who gained one or more Standard Grades or O'Grades, and two of these young people, Liz (17) and Gerard (17), also attained Higher English.

Only two young people, John (18) and Liz (17), enjoyed school. Most of the others 'hated' school and had serious problems with non-attendance and/or behaved disruptively whilst there. As was noted in Chapter 2.2, truancy was almost universal amongst these young people. However, the level of truancy varied from some young people who just missed the occasional day, to some who hardly ever attended school. Fraser (19) was typical of the latter group. He told me:

'It was too easy not to go, know whit I mean, cause you were changing periods and gettin different teachers. So it's just a case of "Well, they'll no notice I'm missing." Miss this period, then it turned into days, weeks and months.'

Truanting was a group activity. For example, Keith (17) told me: 'I didnae dog it maself, a few people dogged it every day. Just stood aboot the shops.' There were other types of non-attendance. Some young people simply refused to go to school, including George (18) and Joan (18). Gerard's (17) parents kept him off school for



a year because they didn't like their children mixing with others. Jolene (17) was injured in a fire at her home when she was 4 years old and missed a lot of her early years at school. Whilst many young people were allocated a social worker because of their non-attendance at school, truancy was not always followed up. Fraser (19), for example, was surprised that he didn't 'get involved with the social work' on account of his regular truancy.

Some of these young people behaved very disruptively when they did attend school, and at least 5 young people in my sample were suspended or expelled from school. For example, Stuart (18) told me: 'I was mad in school, suspended every fortnight, never went.' He told me that he deliberately got himself excluded from school: 'Wee holiday, cause ma ma never kept us in or whatever.'

The young person with the most serious problems in his school career was Robert (19). He was expelled from a school when he was 13 years old for hitting a teacher with a chair and it took several months to find another school which would accept him. He then enrolled in a series of schools but would stop going after a few days. He claimed that teachers would laugh at him when he told them what schoolwork he had done: 'The way they look at it, you're a dunce.'

The serious difficulties which most of these young people faced at home clearly lay at the root of their problems at school and some young people were explicit about this. For example, Craig (17) told me: 'I got papped out when I was still at school. I was stayin wi' friends, know I just couldnae be bothered gettin up for school.'

However, there were also aspects of the school environment itself which contributed to their problems. I investigated what young people 'hated' about school and found that young people's main objections related to the discipline regime and the attitude of teachers. For example, Declan (19) told me: 'I just didnae like it [school]... Didnae like teachers tellin me whit tae dae... I just don't like discipline.' Similarly, Martin (17) said that 'Teachers were too bossy, shoutin at ye for no reason an aw that.' Young people generally felt a lack of autonomy or choice at school: 'You don't get a say in anything at school' (Vicky (17)). There

were also complaints that teachers deliberately undermined young people. Darren (17) said that one teacher told a class of schoolchildren that: 'Ninety eight per cent of people from Drumchapel have no chance of making anything of themselves.' Some young people alleged that they had been singled out for victimisation by teachers. Joan (18), for example, said that teachers picked on her at school because her brother had been badly behaved (see Chapter 2.2).

However, a few young people reported a positive relationship with a particular teacher. For example, Iain (18) said of his guidance teacher: 'She helped me through a lot... I didnae think anyone understood me but she did.' Alan (19) told me that he liked one of his high schools because '...they had excellent teachers who came and went wi' you, they listened to you, try and discuss what the problem was if you were being troublesome.'

The quality of relationships with teachers seemed to be the key factor which determined whether these young people viewed school positively or negatively. Where teachers are regarded as uncaring or arbitrary in meting out discipline, young people with difficult backgrounds are likely to become disaffected with school and their education will suffer. Conversely, there is the potential for a good relationship with a teacher to be of great benefit to disadvantaged young people who may lack other positive adult role models. Teachers are in a prime position to help such young people because they are in contact with them on a day to day basis without the stigma that is attached to involvement with social worker services. However, this assistance must be offered in a manner which is sensitive to peer pressure. Karen (17) highlighted this issue:

'You feel a pure nerd. "I've got tae see ma guidance teacher."  
"How?" "Oh I've got some problems." "Whit? Ya sap." I mean,  
awright, it's easier for lassies to go to the guidance teacher, like  
boys, I mean it's different for them.'

A recent Shelter report has highlighted how policy changes under the last Government made it more difficult for schools to accept and work with pupils



who may require extra care because of their family's homelessness (Power *et al*, 1995, p.4):

'Increased emphasis on competition between schools, and particularly the publication of 'league tables' of achievement and attendance, mean that some schools may be reluctant to accept pupils living in temporary accommodation.'

It is crucial that schools and teachers are also given appropriate resources and incentives to fulfill the role which they could potentially play in supporting and re-integrating disadvantaged young people. Schools in deprived areas like Drumchapel, where a relatively high proportion of children may experience difficulties, should gain extra resources to enable them to help vulnerable pupils.

There is a limit, however, to how far teachers can be expected to deal with the personal problems of their pupils: after all, their main task is to educate large groups. It is crucial that the social work department assists teachers in working with disruptive or otherwise difficult pupils.

A final point is that many of these young people voiced regrets that they hadn't worked harder at school because of the difficulties they faced in the labour market. For example Morag (18) said that she wished she had: '...just mucked in at school, got the work done an that, sat ma exams and passed them and got a job oot of it.' One group discussed the unfairness of what you do at 15 or 16 years old, when you are just 'a stupid wee boy', affecting the rest of your life. Most of these young people seemed to think that their opportunity for education was over. Few had considered entering further education to increase their qualifications. Iain (18) explained: 'I thought it would just be like school, I couldnae take tae school.' Similarly Liz (17) said that she would prefer to work than go to college because she wanted to be: 'Independent of school type places.' Some young people also said that they couldn't afford to go to college, and others thought that they weren't clever enough for further education.

To summarise, these young people generally had very poor attendance records at school and had few qualifications when they left. They seemed well aware that their lack of educational achievement had damaged their opportunities in the labour market (see below). Most of these young people 'hated' school because of the attitude and authority of teachers, but a few had benefited from a good relationship with a particular teacher. This suggests that there is the potential for teachers to play an important role in supporting vulnerable young people. However, schools, particularly those in deprived areas, require additional resources and appropriate incentives to assist disadvantaged pupils. As things stand, it seems that schools are putting some of these young people off education for life.

### **Work and Training**

Chapter 1.2 reviewed the developments in the labour market which have so seriously affected the position of disadvantaged young people. In this section I will examine my sample of young homeless people's experience of work and training; their attitude towards unemployment and working; the difficulties they face in finding a job; and the link between youth unemployment and social problems such as homelessness, crime and drug abuse.

#### *Experience of Work and Training*

At the point when I first interviewed them, 19 of the 25 young people in the biographical sample were unemployed, and 6 were working, on training schemes or at college. Of these 25, 18 had been on at least one YT. Also, 4 young men had possessed at least one full-time job since leaving school, 6 young people had had a casual or seasonal job, and 1 had been employed part-time. Although all of these young people had experienced unemployment, only 3 out of the 25 had never worked or trained.

I concentrated my analysis on young people's views of YT as this was their main experience of the labour market. Most of the young people who had been on a YT course had experienced multiple placements. Only one young person had completed a YT course, and another had left one placement for a 'positive' reason, that is, to start a full-time job. All of the others had failed to complete all of their



YT placements for various 'negative' reasons. Several had been sacked from YTs for reasons such as failing to attend college or 'carrying on', and a few had lost their training place because of missed days due to their homelessness. There were a couple of young people who were laid off from YTs because their employer closed down. However, most commonly young people left their YT courses because they disliked them.

The complaints I heard about YT echoed the points made in earlier research (see Raffe, 1989; SPA, 1992). Almost all of these young people condemned YT because of the low rates of allowances. For example, Jennifer (18) told me: 'Like you were on your feet from 9 in the morning till 6 at night, and I was only getting paid £35 a week which is like slave labour really.' They also highlighted the poor quality of training they experienced on YT schemes. Interestingly, young people's dissatisfaction with YT schemes more often focused on *lack* of work rather than on being overworked, despite the general comments they made about 'slave labour'. For example, Stuart (18) left one YT because: 'they never learnt you anythin, you just sat in the cafe aw day, that was it.' Young people not only wanted to be kept busy, they were also keen to gain skills rather than simply being a dogsbody. For example, Sandra (18) contrasted the two YTs she had in hairdressing. She 'loved' the first one because:

'They were learnin ye things, like showin ye how tae cut an that. In the other one they were just treating you like a slave: "Dae this, dae that." I didnae like it at aw cause I wasnae learnin anythin, too busy brushin flairs or somethin.'

The poor job prospects of young people who have participated in YT, and in particular the failure of employers to keep YT trainees on after their placement was completed, was another key theme. Kate (19) commented:

'They're meant to be training you, but really they're just getting you in to dae the dirty work. Once your two years are over, that's you, you're ta ta, they get another one. It just starts all over again.'

Grant (20) summed up many young people's feelings when he said:

'I would take a scheme if I knew it had prospects at the end of it. If they turned round tae me and "You dae that for a year for £30 a week" I'd dae it as long as I knew I was gonnae get somewhere at the end of it.'

This quote highlights the key difference between YTs and apprenticeships. Apprentices were paid low wages and were sometimes badly treated, but they could look forward to something better once they were 'time-served.' In contrast, YT trainees often face unemployment after two years of what they view as exploitation.

Other complaints focused on the lack of choice young people had over training. James (24) told me that they just 'dump' you anywhere there is a space, and explained that he wanted to work with young people but instead was placed in a gardening YT. Certainly, given the very high proportion of young men in my sample who were placed on labouring YTs with a construction firm or gardening YTs with the local authority, little account seems to be taken of their personal aspirations or talents.

The variability of YT schemes were recognised by some young people (see Jones and Wallace, 1992). For example Grant (20) told me: 'Some of them [YTs] are awright but you don't know which ones.' Also, despite the general negativity about YT, there were a few young people who reported enjoying a particular YT placement despite failing to complete it. Kate (19), for example, 'loved' her YT in an old folks home. Young people had a clear preference for the work placement part of the YT and generally disliked the college sessions. In fact, several people left a YT to avoid college despite enjoying the work placement, and John (18) was sacked from his YT in mechanics because of his failure to attend college. He explained:

'The guys I was workin wi', they were brilliant, and there was a lot of work, they were lettin me dae a lot of work. When I went tae



college, I hated goin away tae Springburn and the teachers there were just a pain in the arse. They weren't learnin you anythin. At work I was learning something, but at college I don't think I was. I like tae dae stuff. You were sittin doon [at college] and they were talking tae us instead of giving us work tae dae... they were just talkin tae us like weans.'

This is similar to the findings of the Mori survey that most young people found work placements more useful than the training element of YTs (SPA, 1992). Whether young people on YTs dislike college because school has left them disenchanted with education, because they have literacy problems, or because of the inappropriateness of college teaching, is something that merits further investigation.

### *Experience of Unemployment and Attitude to Working*

A key element in the 'underclass' thesis espoused by Charles Murray and his followers is that large groups of unemployed young males and young single mothers have different values from the rest of society, and in particular they lack the desire to work (Murray, 1990). Such persons are content to remain on social security benefits because they have entered a 'dependency culture' induced by the generosity of the 'nanny' welfare state. Furthermore, this underclass is now so vast that it threatens the stability of mainstream society and is the source of a multitude of social problems including crime, poverty and unemployment. Drastic reductions in welfare benefits are recommended by exponents of the underclass thesis to halt its further expansion. The notion of an underclass has been bitterly disputed by more progressive social commentators and academics (Holman, 1994; NACRO, 1995), but these ideas were influential within the last Conservative Government. As young homeless people form a key part of this alleged underclass I thought it would be interesting to explore their attitude to work and unemployment.

Almost all of the young people I spoke to stressed their desire to work, and in fact most of them said that getting a job was the key to resolving their problems (see Chapter 4.1). One of the main reasons they wanted to work was to alleviate

boredom. As Gerard (17) put it: 'You're bored sitting about the hoose aw day.' A related point was that working gave them a sense of purpose. Liz (17) told me that having a job: '...makes your life feel important.' Having the opportunity to earn a reasonable income, and thus the ability to participate in social activities, was another important reason why young people wanted to work. John (18) told me that he wanted a job because: 'It's somethin tae dae during the day, and then at the weekend you've got money, can go oot.' Similarly, a group of unemployed young men told me that when you're working:

Stephen (22): 'You can dae things, because I mean see when you're unemployed you cannae dae nuthin.'

Grant (20): 'When your mates are goin oot you cannae go wi' them.'

Stephen (22): 'You cannae have a girlfriend cause you cannae take her out.'

Jon (18): 'You see aw your mates goin oot and gettin motors and things like that, you're like that "I could do that an aw, if I only got the chance."'

Another attraction of working for these young people was the opportunity to expand their social networks. Stuart (17) said he would like to work because: 'I would like to meet new people.' Many young men talked about gaining 'respect' from other people, particularly from their parents, through working. For example, Martin (17) said that having a job 'Helps you get on wi' your ma.' Work was also seen as a means to gain self-respect, as Jon (18) said: 'Working gives you a wee bit of pride.'

A final, but important, point young people highlighted was how unemployment and low income robbed them of the opportunity to plan for their future. Grant (20) told me:

'The thing about being unemployed as well, you've only got so much money so you cannae plan. You need all the money you've got for the here and now. You cannae like save. If people get a job



their whole life changes, then they can always start looking tae get their ain hoose.'

There were only a handful of young people out of the 53 that I interviewed altogether who confessed not being bothered about work. Martin (17) and Keith (17) fell into this category, but further investigation of their statements revealed that whilst they didn't want a YT they would like a 'decent' job.

There is little evidence, therefore, of a work-shy underclass amongst these young people from Drumchapel. These findings are similar to the conclusions reached by Kirk *et al* (1991) and Holman (1994) about disadvantaged young people in Edinburgh and Easterhouse respectively. However, it was interesting to note that many of the young people I spoke to subscribed to the same view as Murray (1990) that the majority of people in their community were work-shy, while specifically excluding themselves from that category. John (18), for example, told me: 'Maist of them don't want tae work around here.' James (24) made a more subtle point:

'See wi' Drumchapel having such a high unemployment rate for so long, people are used tae staying in their beds until midday. And then if they dae get a job, they have tae get up at 7am to start work at 9am, it's just a whole change of lifestyle, and they find it really hard. Some people end up just giving the jobs up.'

This is similar to McGregor and McConnachie's (1995, p.1595) argument that 'it takes time to become reacquainted with the discipline of the workplace', and ongoing support must be provided to the long-term unemployed from deprived areas when they re-enter the labour market. Young people who have never had a 'proper' job are likely to find this process even more problematic. However, acknowledging that these difficulties exist is not the same as blaming the victim in the manner adopted by Murray, or accusing them of having inferior values to the rest of society.

### *Difficulties Finding Work*

These young people wanted a 'decent' job, by which they meant a full-time job at a reasonable wage. However, young people's income aspirations were extremely modest as they generally considered good money to be around £60 or £70 a week.

Many young people I interviewed emphasised how hard they looked for work by regularly attending the Careers Office or Job Centre, looking in the papers, searching shop windows, writing to employers, and so on. Most young people seemed to feel that the staff of the Careers Service were as helpful as they could be but only had YTs to offer. The Job Centre was viewed much more negatively, typical comments were: 'That Job Centre's a joke' (Liz (17)).

These youngsters identified a series of obstacles which blocked their access to a 'decent' job. The most important was their lack of academic or vocational qualifications. Keith (17) told me:

'For jobs you need qualifications, if young people have got qualifications, aye, they've got a good chance of gettin a decent job. Nowadays you need qualifications before you get intae work.'

Another problem young people experienced whilst looking for work was that employers tended to be very age specific in their requirements, and often seemed to be looking either for new school leavers or older, and experienced, employees:

Liz (17): 'It's either 16 rigid or it's 18 and over.'

Joan (17): 'There's never anythin in between.'

Some young people felt they suffered an additional handicap in the job market because they came from a deprived area. Iain (18) explained: 'They ask where you come fae, and you say somethin like Drumchapel and they just show you where the door is.' This comment is supported by the findings of MacGregor and McConnachie (1995, p.1588) who highlighted the problem of 'stigmatisation by employers of residents of disadvantaged areas.'



To add to their difficulties, there was also a feeling that many parents do not understand how hard it is for young people to find jobs in the present economic climate:

Jane (17): 'Your ma expects you to be oot at 9 in the morning looking for a job, but there's nae jobs.'

Kate (17): 'I think some of them are still living away back, know, when they were wee [young] cause they always say "See when I was wee, I had a job, I got oot and I got a job just like that."'

For young people living away from the parental home, the 'unemployment trap' also posed a barrier to them taking up work. This is discussed below.

There seemed to be a complicated relationship between gender and job opportunities. Some young men, such as Gerard (17), claimed that some jobs advertisements were limited to women but there were never any jobs specifically for men. Also, some young men thought that it was easier for young women to gain employment than young men because there were more 'female' type jobs advertised than 'male' type jobs. But they also pointed out that women were disadvantaged in that they got paid less than men. Many girls, on the other hand, complained that traditional male occupations were not open to them. Sandra (17), for example, said that she would have liked to have been a bricklayer but '...they don't give the lassies a chance at it.' Liz (17) added: 'Aye, there's a lot of discrimination.' These young people's analysis is fairly accurate in that there has been a shift in the labour market towards the type of jobs commonly held by women, and they do continue to form a low proportion of the workforce in traditional male industries. Also, both female unemployment and wages are lower than male (see Chapter 1.2).

Some young men had considered joining the armed forces. Out of a group of 4 unemployed young men, 3 had attempted to enter the army but all had been unsuccessful. Jon (18) told me: 'Cause that was the only way out, the army, after I got paid off. But I got a knockback from the army.' Gerard (17) was the only

young person I interviewed who had experienced the army. He left after six months because he was homesick. He explained why he joined:

'I didnae have anythin else, if I had like a good science mark I could have maybe did a college course but the army wis just like a last resort.'

However even this 'last resort' is increasingly being denied to disadvantaged young men as the armed forces become more selective in an era of high unemployment.

### *Impact of Unemployment: The Link with Homelessness, Crime and Drugs*

The links between unemployment and homelessness have already been highlighted at several points in the thesis and are simply summarised here. First, as Chapter 2.2 demonstrated, unemployment lies at the root of much homelessness amongst young people, particularly in relation to those on the 'local area' pathways. Second, being homeless makes it extremely difficult to gain or sustain employment. This is particularly true of roofless young people. As Denny (17), who was sleeping rough in Drumchapel, put it: 'I've no got an address, nae chance of gettin a job.' Even young homeless people who do have a roof over their heads often found that the instability of their lives made it difficult to hold down a job. For example, Craig (17) told me:

'I had a hard time on my YTs, gettin papped oot of places. Know, I was taking weeks off trying tae find somewhere else.'

A recent NACRO (1995, p.27) report on crime and social policy commented that: 'Unemployment amongst the young creates a void, filled by drug use, which in turn prompts high rates of offending.' I found a great deal of evidence amongst my sample of young men to support this position. For example, Fraser (19) explained:

'When you've nae money you go oot and break intae things, the money you get you go and spend it on drugs. If you're no full of



drugs it's worse than ever. If you're walking about straight the day just drags in, but if you're full of drugs you don't mind.'

The criminal activities themselves also help to alleviate the boredom and frustration these young people face. For example, John (18) told me:

'There is nuthin tae dae just stand about the streets so you want somethin tae dae, some excitement tae happen, so you start daein stupid things like trying tae get intae hooses or pelt polis motors wi' bricks. I don't want tae dae it but there's nuthin else tae dae, it's no for the money really, it's just for somethin tae dae, some carry on. If there was somethin tae dae like work, or a club, I'd go tae it.'

Involvement in crime does, of course, carry the risk of prison. Here we find another link between crime and unemployment. When I asked John (18) how he felt about going to prison he told me:

John: 'If I had a job it would bother me, I've no got a job so it doesnae bother me really.'

SF: 'Why not?'

John: 'I'm sittin about daein nuthin anyway, so bein in the jail, it's the same. If I had a job, I'd end up bein sacked, I'd consider it.'

This fatalism about prison is similar to the fatalism I encountered amongst some unemployed young women in relation to pregnancy (see Chapter 3.1), and seems to have its roots in the hopelessness and futility they feel about the future.

### *Summary*

This section has demonstrated the importance of work to these young homeless people and the destructive impact that unemployment and poor quality training has had on their lives. Young people need the means to form an adult identity, and employment is the traditional passport to adult status for those from working class

backgrounds (Jones and Wallace, 1992). If they are denied this transition to adulthood through the world of work they will find other routes. For some young women this may include becoming teenage mothers, for some young men the route may be through crime and/or drugs. If we wish to alter this behaviour we must provide pathways into employment for disadvantaged young people.

The most recent employment and urban regeneration policies have concentrated upon supply-side interventions in the labour market - improving the 'employability' of people without jobs. However, the limitations of these measures must be recognised. No matter how well equipped the labour force is to take up employment, and regardless of how fairly and effectively people are competing against one another, unemployment will persist until a sufficient number of jobs is available for those seeking work. In other words, to reduce unemployment there must also be a change in the demand for labour. If economic growth does not create this demand, then there can be no escape from the need for large-scale government intervention to create 'real' jobs. This need is particularly acute in deprived areas, such as Drumchapel, and for sections of the labour force which are especially vulnerable to unemployment, such as young people. (See Webster (1997) for a discussion of the inadequacy of supply-side policies in tackling long-term unemployment and the need to create blue-collar jobs in the areas of highest unemployment.)

If we cannot resolve large-scale youth unemployment or are not prepared to make the sacrifices necessary to do so, such as paying higher taxes, then as a society we must accept the consequences which will include high crime and substance abuse rates. We must not take the easy way out by 'blaming the victim' and labeling them an underclass in order to ease our collective conscience. Also, we must take responsibility for those who suffer from our decision not to intervene to eradicate mass unemployment, and at the very least provide them with decent social security protection. This we have manifestly failed to do, as is demonstrated in the next section of this chapter.



## Social Security System

Chapter 1.3 provided an overview of the social security system, and highlighted the drastic cuts in benefits for young people which have been implemented since the 1980s. In this section I will summarise young homeless people's experiences of, and views on, the social security system.

The young people I interviewed felt that the restriction on benefits to under 25s were unfair, and particularly objected to the withdrawal of entitlement from 16 and 17 year olds. They strongly rejected the notion that they could rely on their parents if unemployed:

Tom (16): 'Your parents might no be able tae afford tae keep you.'

Douglas (16): 'You've been depending on your parents for 16 or 17 years haven't you? It's aboot time you started daein things for yourself.'

Most of the young homeless people I interviewed had disrupted employment and income careers: moving between zero income, wages, severe hardship payments, training allowances, Bridging Allowance, and so on. I concentrated my analysis on two key situations for 16 and 17 year olds: living with no income and receiving severe hardship payments. I also briefly examined some IS and HB issues affecting over-18s.

Young people living at home usually presumed that they weren't entitled to benefits, as Liz (17) said: 'I thought because I was under 18 ma parents had tae keep me.' Therefore most of them had spent at least some time at home with no income. This created serious tensions within the household, as was reported in Chapter 2.2, because these young people were expected to contribute board money. One group explained that young people from Drumchapel could not stay at home if they had no dig money: 'You're papped.' Grant (20) explained that the need to pay board money was the main reason why young people were forced into YTs:

'If you're skint and your ma's wantin digs off you, you've got to take a YT because you cannae get broo money... there's a lot of pressure on you when you're young cause you need tae gie dig money.'

These findings are supported by Jones' (1991) earlier research which indicated that unemployed young people from working class households were expected to pay board money to their parents, unlike young people in full-time education who were generally exempted. She therefore argued that the housing costs of young people living at home should be recognised in social security and training allowances.

The situation of young people living away from home with no income was even more desperate. A few young people had experienced this situation whilst still under 16, including Craig (17) who managed to keep a roof over his head by moving between friends' houses. However, George (18) had to resort to prostitution to survive and Margaret (17) slept rough and begged. The situation of these under 16 'runaways' presents particular difficulties for policy makers because, as a matter of law, they should not be living independently. However there were also over-16s in my sample who spent a period living away from home without any income, some of whom were forced to sleep rough. One of the most distressing examples of complete destitution was Kylie (17), whose biography is presented in Chapter 2.2. Denny (17) found himself destitute while sleeping rough in Drumchapel and begged from friends at the local shops: 'Just the people that I know, I don't ask anybody else. I don't really beg, it's maistly tapping, so I can pay them back.' He also broke into houses and garages to provide himself with an income: 'I don't have a choice but. Nuthin else tae feed maself.'

It is true that these young people would probably have qualified for severe hardship had they applied. It is also true that some homeless people may have found themselves without income under previous benefit regimes. However, it is seems very likely that the withdrawal of automatic entitlement from 16 and 17 years olds, and the difficulties involved in securing discretionary severe hardship payments, have made this position of complete destitution much more common



(see also Kirk *et al*, 1991). It should be remembered that the young people who most need severe hardship payments are often not particularly self-confident or articulate. Faced with the complexities and bureaucracy involved in claiming this benefit many, like Denny (17), will simply give up.

I will now turn to consider the experience of those who did receive severe hardship payments. All of the young people staying in the official network of accommodation had received severe hardship or other social security benefits, and this had usually been secured with the assistance of the staff there. This access to income was a major advantage of taking an official route through homelessness. Kate (19), for example, told me that she only began to receive benefits once she moved into Southdeen and it was 'easier' because she was 'kinda homeless' and Southdeen staff would help her. There was often a delay, however, in the benefit being paid and young people usually had to take a Crisis Loan to tide them over.

It was less common for young people on unofficial routes through homelessness, such as staying with friends or relatives, to claim severe hardship payments but many of these did receive Bridging Allowance for a limited period. Young people who did secure severe hardship payments while living in these situations usually did so with the help of an agency such as Detached Youth. A few young people had received severe hardship payments for a period while living at home, but they had usually lied and said that they were staying with friends or relatives. No young person in my sample appeared to have managed to secure severe hardship payments while sleeping rough. All of the young people who applied for severe hardship seemed to have been successful in their claim.

The problems of these young people were far from over once they had managed to secure severe hardship payments. Many had their claim interrupted for various reasons such as failure to re-apply, refusing a YT place or missing a Careers appointment. The insecure and discretionary nature of these benefits was a major problem:

Liz (17): 'Severe hardship can get taken off you, and if you re-apply there's always the chance that you'll no get it. Every 8 weeks

10 you've got to re-apply and they'll ask why you've no got a job or  
11 whatever.'

12 Gerard (17): 'I don't like depending on social security, I'd like to  
13 know if there's nae YT I've got money. I don't like this if you don't  
14 take a YT you don't get nuthin.'

Even those young people who were over 18 and thus entitled to IS (as it was called then) reported difficulties in surviving on the reduced rate for under-25s, particularly when living away from home. Mark (21) who lived in a scatter flat said that it wasn't fair that he received the same rate of benefit as young people who still lived at home because he had additional expenses such as food and power.

However, the most serious benefits problem faced by 18-25 year olds living away from home was the unemployment trap created by the HB system (see Chapter 1.3). I asked Fraser (19), who had his own mainstream flat, if he would like to work:

'I'd love to work, but it'd be harder. I'd need to earn about £200 a week so I could pay ma rent cause it's £137 if you're no unemployed.'

The unemployment trap is even stronger in specialist homeless or young persons accommodation because the rents are very high, even in poor quality adult hostels. Robert (19) told me: 'If you work in here [adult hostel] you've got tae pay the full rent, that's £92, couldnae work and pay that.' Mark (21), who lived in a scatter flat, commented: 'By the time you pay your rent you're coming off worse - need to get a really good job.'

Thus the Conservative's Government's combined policies of holding down youth wages, and at the same time de-regulating private sector rents and pushing up public sector rents, has made young people who are living away from home increasingly dependent on HB. This in turn has created an escalating HB bill and an enormous work disincentive for many able-bodied young people. The latest



restrictions to HB (see Chapter 1.3) will increase the impoverishment of young people in the private rented sector but will do little to reduce the unemployment trap.

This issue should be of particular concern to housing agencies which provide young people with furnished and supported transitional accommodation and recoup the costs through HB by charging high rents. Such policies are well-intentioned but effectively stop these young people taking up employment and thus block another key aspect of their transition to adulthood.

### **Social Work and Youth Services**

Chapter 1.3 summarised the legal framework of social work responsibilities for young people, and summarised previous research on the relationship between young homeless people and social work services. In this section I explore the experiences of, and attitude to, social work and youth services amongst my sample of young homeless people.

Of the 25 young homeless people who participated in the biographical interviews, 9 had spent time in residential care, 10 had a social worker as a child but had never been in residential care, and another 6 had never had a social worker. However, even among these 6 young people with no personal involvement with social work, 3 had siblings who had been in care or had a social worker. So there had been some degree of social work intervention in the families of virtually all of these young people.

This study therefore replicates the findings of other researchers that a high proportion of young homeless people have a background of residential care and involvement with social work services (Caskie, 1992). However, the implication of some studies that social work involvement somehow ‘causes’ homelessness requires careful consideration, a point also noted by Caskie (1992). It seems unlikely that young people who would not otherwise have done so become homeless *as a result of* their contact with social work. The more convincing explanation of the link is that social workers are effectively targeting their services on the most vulnerable children who are at greatest risk of homelessness.

However, this does not mean that we should not expect more from social worker professionals in terms of protecting these vulnerable young people from homelessness. There are also specific issues in relation to the 'secondary' problems associated with staying in, and moving out of, residential care. This section of the chapter discusses young homeless people's experience of social workers and residential care, including the leaving care process. There is also a brief review of their views on detached youth services, which they often contrasted with social work services, at the end of the section.

### *Young People's Experience of Social Workers*

Young people in this research were, on balance, negative about social workers (like Bannister *et al*, 1993). What they seemed to dislike most about social worker professionals was their 'nosiness'. Young people particularly resented intrusion into sensitive issues such as their parents' alcohol problems or violence. Joan (18) was bitter about her experience of social workers:

'They're too nosy, they pry into everything. They want tae know your whole life story. If you've ever been battered fae your family. Which never ever happened tae me really. Just made me feel as if they were running ma dad doon, trying to make me say things that werenae true: "Does he hit you?" They were expecting me to turn round and say "Aye", whereas I had turned round and said "No".'

Social workers were often compared unfavorably with other helping agencies on the basis that they offered less practical help. Craig (17) said:

'Ma social worker doesnae dae nuthin for me, whereas ma key worker [in a residential project] has did everythin for me. He got me Crisis Loans, money whenever I wanted. Went doon tae ma social worker asking for a S12, he says: "cannae dae it."

Kylie (17) told me that she hated social workers because they did not help her when she was homeless: 'I mainly think they couldnae be bothered.' Several young



people complained about the inaccessibility of their social worker. Roger (19) said that: 'Every time you wanted somethin he wasnae there.'

There was also a sense that social workers were controlling and manipulative. Robert (19) told me: 'They just want to run your life, tell you tae dae this, dae that.' Relationships seemed particularly poor when young people's social workers frequently changed. Craig (17) explained:

'Over a year I had three social workers. He [his last social worker] didn't have a clue what was goin on. I just couldnae be bothered sitting doon and tellin him everythin that happened over the last six months because the other social worker knew.'

Another major issue for young people was the stigma attached to having a social worker:

Paul (18): 'See if you get a reputation for having a social worker, everybody thinks you must have done somethin stupid.'

Caroline (17): 'Aye, done somethin wrong.'

However, there were also positive comments made by some young people about social workers which suggested possible avenues to build more satisfactory relationships. These more positive contacts with social workers were often associated with effective practical assistance. For example, Sandra (18) was very enthusiastic about her social worker:

'Like she'll help me if I'm in trouble with the police or anythin like that, or if I need money. She helped me tae get in here [Southdeen] as well.'

Some young people also appreciated help from social workers with emotional problems. Dougie (19) said:

'Social work have helped me all the way... helpin me cope with ma life an aw that, goin tae work on ma problems.'

A sustained personal relationship seemed to be the key to overcoming young's people's initial distrust of social workers. Sandra (18) said:

'At first I didnae want a social worker cause I thought they were gonnae interfere wi' ma life. Once you get tae know whit they're like, get tae know what that person's like, she's brilliant.'

One point that came across very strongly from young people was an appreciation of social workers being 'straight' with them, and a dislike of those who 'avoided the topic'. There was also a preference for social workers who communicated in an informal way. Caroline (17) defended social workers in the following terms:

'The past two social workers I've had, they told you where you stood. If I'd be cheeky to them they'd be just as cheeky right back.'

Kate (19) and Sandra (18) were the two young people in the biographical sample who were most positive about their experience of social work. In both cases their social workers left the door open after their case was closed and told them that they would always be there if they needed anything.

### *Young People's Experience of Residential Care*

I focus mainly on children's homes here because I have only very limited data on other forms of residential care such as residential schools. However, there are some brief points made about foster care at the end of the section.

Young people made many criticisms about residential care, which are discussed below, but it is important to emphasise that the predominant feeling for most of those received into care was overwhelming relief at escaping from their family problems (like Triseliotis *et al*, 1995). George (18) said that the happiest time of his life was:



'The night I got took intae care... aw it was brilliant, everybody was dead pally, big dinner, toys. It was brilliant man, best night of ma life.'

He explained the advantages of residential care:

'...it was the first time I really had pals cause when I lived wi' ma family I was in for 6 o'clock at night, in ma bed for 7. [In care] I got fed well, I could dae ma ain thing, I had money tae buy sweeties. Things I never had before. I gained ma childhood doon there, cause I never had a childhood before.'

Denny (17) was also happier in care than living with his mum and dad. He particularly liked one children's home because 'it was dead comfortable an aw that' and 'everybody liked me there.' Dougie (19) said:

'Care was the best thing for me. That's where I wanted tae be, in care, I've got pals there, there are people looking after me, that's the way I like it.'

However, it is equally important not to underestimate the trauma many young people experienced entering residential care. Sandra (17) was admitted into care '7 days after my 15th birthday.' She told me: 'It's horrible. I wouldnae wish it oan ma worst enemy.' Young people, even those who were glad to enter care, described 'hassles' and 'fights', and a severe lack of privacy in children's homes. Another problem young people faced in residential care was the 'bad influences' which resulted from the concentration of young people with difficult backgrounds. Ken (22) told me:

'You learn that much in homes an aw you know. I went in and I had family problems - you learn how tae steal motors, break intae hooses.'

The problems these young people faced were often compounded by the prejudice they were forced to contend with in school (see also West, 1995). Caroline (17) told me:

'In school, it's a case of "Oh, she's a lassie in care, don't go near her." "She's got scabies" or whatever else because you're in care. "She must have killed somebody if she's in care." I got battered senseless because I was in a children's home. I mean, I wanted tae go tae school, get some qualifications, leave school, get a house and a job - basic, perfect dream for everybody. Ended up I dogged school so much I got put out.'

George (18) summed up the balance of these young people's feelings on children's homes:

'It's no a good place, everybody should be wi' their family. But if you've got problems like I had, it's the best place.'

Finally, a brief comment should be made on young people's experience of foster care. There were 5 young people in one of the group interviews who had stayed with foster parents. They were generally positive about this experience, and all 5 were still in contact with their foster parents. Caroline (17) told me that she 'classes' her foster parents as her real parents because, although they have fostered more than 70 children, they still had time to treat her as their 'wee lassie'. George (18) said that his foster parents were 'the best people I ever met.' Margaret (17) said that she still visited her foster parents and Duncan (21) wrote to his.

The group thought that it was very common for young people to keep in touch with foster parents after they left care. I asked what support they offered:

Margaret (17): 'A roof over your head, money, support - better than your ain family does.'

Caroline (17): 'A shoulder to cry on.'



### *The Process of Leaving Care*

There is considerable evidence from the previous studies reviewed in Chapter 1.3 that young people face great difficulties during the process of leaving care (Triseliotis *et al*, 1995; West, 1995), and this is supported by my research. There are four main issues here: the timing of leaving care; the move-on accommodation that is arranged; the preparation young people receive for life after care; and aftercare support.

The young people I interviewed generally felt that 'you're not mentally old enough' to leave care at 16 years old. Yet several of them had a similar experience to that of Margaret (17): 'If you're in a home they pap you oot as soon as you're 16. I didnae want tae leave, I had tae, nae other choice.' Other young people said that they had wanted to leave care as soon as they could, but had then wanted to be re-admitted. Young people felt strongly that they should be able to re-enter care as a 'safety net', but they had widely differing experiences of attempting this. For example, George (18) told me: 'I done everythin tae get back intae care' but the Children's Panel would not re-admit him because he was 16. Whereas Duncan (21) said he had no problem re-entering care and commented: 'it's only if you push their hand away'.

Several young people left care on their 16th birthday, or shortly before, and most of them went back to live with their parents. However, these arrangements often broke down and the young person found themselves homeless. For example, Denny (17) went back to his parents when he was 15 and a half. He was taken off supervision 6 months later, as soon as he was 16, and a year later he was homeless and sleeping rough in Drumchapel. Ken (22) told me he went back to his parents a month before his 16th birthday and: 'I was back in three weeks and that was me oot.' He then became homeless. Only one young person in my biographical sample had moved into supported lodgings on leaving care (Dougie (19)), and none had went straight from care into their own flat. However several young people took up a tenancy shortly after leaving care after being ejected from the parental home, and thus many of the comments they make about aftercare support relate to independent living.

The need for preparation for leaving care and aftercare support was emphasised by many young people. For example, Declan (19) said:

'I think there should be something for people leaving care... Cause a lot of people are coming out of care and they're not knowing whit tae dae... They've been in institutions, in and out of places, and they've not had help with budgeting an things. Then as soon as they leave there they're going intae a flat. They've not got a clue what tae dae.'

Sandra (18) was in care until she was 17 and did spend 6 months 'upstairs' in a 'training for independence unit' where they made their own meals. However, she commented that 'ye wurnae really trained for anythin.' She said they should have prepared her for:

'...living on your own, handling your money situation, things like that. An trying tae run your ain hoose.'

The key problem care-leavers faced, in addition to money management, seemed to be coping with the isolation of living on their own. As Paul (18) said: 'The problem wi' getting your own hoose is that you feel dead lonely an aw that.'

These young people clearly needed ongoing support when they left care, even though some had rejected such assistance initially. Again, young people had different experiences of aftercare services. Sandra (18) had received intense support from her social worker after leaving care, whereas when I asked Denny (17) about aftercare support he told me:

'Naebody, once I got oot the home that was me, I didnae have a social worker or anythin anymair.'

Kate (19) felt strongly that:



'If somebody's got a big problem or had a bad time in their life and they need kinda like a social worker then I think they should stay wi' you till you're over 16.'

It is clear from these accounts that many of these young people were inadequately supported through the leaving care process.

### *Detached Youth Services*

Young people were universally positive about detached youth services, both Detached Youth in Drumchapel and CCI in Glasgow city centre (see Chapter 1.5). In fact, most young people who had had contact with either of these services picked them out as the most helpful agency they had been in touch with.

This positive response focused primarily on the practical orientation of their work, such as helping young people sort out their benefit entitlements. For example, Margaret (17) said of CCI:

'They were excellent, they gave you money for grub and tried to get you in the HAC.'

Young people were also enthusiastic about the accessibility and informality of the outreach approach. Martin (17) said that he got to know the Detached Youth staff because they 'walk aboot the streets and get tae know you' and 'if you need help they are always there fur you.' Similarly, Stuart (18) said Detached Youth were 'very helpful' and 'you can just drop in anytime, when you're feeling pissed off or somethin.'

They liked the 'down to earth' approach of outreach workers, and were particularly impressed by their acceptance of young people's drug use, drinking, swearing, etc. Young people also appreciated the amount of time detached youth workers spent with them. George (18) said of CCI: 'They sit and talk tae ye for hours.'

Detached youth workers were compared favourably to social workers:

Iain (18): 'Like social workers, they're goin in at 9 o'clock in the morning, if you don't go to see them - tough luck. People don't know they can go intae see them, you need people to come oot onto the streets where we're all hanging about and come up and talk tae us.'

Stuart (18): 'They [Detached Youth] don't come doon like a social worker wi' the shirt an tie an aw that.'

For the reasons discussed below, there may be limitations on the extent to which social workers could adopt the working methods favoured by young people. However, this data does show that there is definite value in an outreach approach in dealing with young people.

### *Summary*

Young homeless people often resented social workers on the basis that they were prying, manipulative, inaccessible and offered little practical help. On the other hand, there were also young people with positive attitudes to social workers who were willing to defend them. These more satisfactory contacts were associated with sustained personal relationships, practical assistance and a frank and informal approach, which is similar to the findings of Triseliotis *et al* (1995). Detached youth methods were very popular with these young people, and social workers were often compared unfavourably to these outreach services.

There are some very difficult issues raised by these points. Social workers do not have direct access to many of the resources such as housing or cash benefits which young people require, and thus cannot always provide suitable material assistance. The very nature of a social worker's task is that they do have to 'pry' into sensitive areas, particularly in relation to their child protection responsibilities. Also, as a state bureaucracy with statutory duties, there may be a limit to the informality which could be introduced into their procedures. Social workers are professionals who must be able to move on in their careers, or retire, and thus end their involvement with clients. That said, there are changes in practice suggested by these findings which would be feasible, and these are discussed in Chapter 4.3.



Reception into care was generally seen as a positive intervention by the young people involved, although they encountered difficulties coping with the residential care environment. My evidence is very limited on this point, but young people did often seem to have a good relationship with their foster parents and maintained contact with them after they left their care. There is clearly much work to be done to improve the leaving care process for young people, and recommendations on this issue are also presented in Chapter 4.3. However, it may be the case that services for care-leavers have improved since this research was conducted because of the development of policies such as Strathclyde Regional Council's 'Through Care Strategy' and the implementation of the Children (Scotland) Act.

### **Housing Services**

This section explores young people's experience of a range of housing services, including specialist youth and homelessness facilities and mainstream accommodation (see Chapter 1.5 for overview of the service network).

### *HAC*

The difficulties surrounding the HAC's location in the city centre have already been explored (see Chapter 2.2). This section discusses other aspects of young people's experience of this facility.

Most young people were complementary about the staff in the HAC: '...really nice and they were helpful' (Joan (18)). Young people also repeatedly made the point that the physical environment was comfortable and pleasant in the HAC. However these positive factors were overshadowed by the intimidating social environment created by their fellow residents, as discussed in Chapter 2.2. Sandra (18) commented on the HAC:

'It's the people that comes intae it. Too many junkies and alchies comin in. Didnae like it. It was a nice place but it was horrible people that was in it.'

This may seem an intractable problem; after all, it is difficult for specialist services to avoid placing homeless people together. Moreover, well-trained staff

and good facilities do not appear to overcome these concerns. However, there may be ways of making the atmosphere in such facilities less intimidating, and these are discussed in Chapter 4.3.

The other key point to emerge was that access to the HAC seemed to have been problematic for some homeless young people. The experiences were variable: some young people's claims that their parents had thrown them out were subject to investigation, while others had their explanations accepted. A group of young women discussed the difficulties posed by agencies such as the HAC confirming young people's homelessness with their parents:

Jane (17): 'You might have left of your ain accord cause you cannae take anymair, gettin doins or somethin.'

Vicky (17): 'If you've left on a bad side she's gonnae automatically say: "Aye, I'll take her back."'

Lynne (17): 'She doesnae want tae look as if she doesnae care, know whit I mean. They'll phone and she'll say: "Oh, no she left herself", but it wasnae.'

Two important issues are highlighted here. First, embarrassment or vindictiveness may lead a parent to deny that they have thrown their child out. Young people are at the mercy of their parents' goodwill, which may not always be forthcoming. Second, young people driven out by intolerable circumstances, rather than being evicted, may find it difficult to establish their case. They may be unwilling to re-live their distress to a housing officer, even a sympathetic and highly trained one. While one must accept the necessity of HAC and similar services establishing that applicants are genuinely homeless, they should take account of the reluctance of both parents and young people to be entirely truthful about their situation at home. Recommendations on this point are also offered in Chapter 4.3.

### *Southdeen Complex*

As was discussed in Chapter 2.2, the overriding advantage of the Southdeen Complex in young people's eyes was its location 'in the Drum'. There were a number of other aspects of the Southdeen Complex about which young people



were very positive. Sandra (18) preferred living there to staying at home or with friends because she had:

'My independence. Making my own decisions, no havin tae answer tae anybody else except the rules of the Complex.'

These young people generally appreciated the support they received from Southdeen staff. Liz (17) said:

'They keep an eye on you... they make sure that you're feeding yourself right, coping awright wi' your money, and if you've got problems wi' the DSS they'll explain. If you've got a lot of problems you can sit doon and talk to them about it.'

They liked the staff being there 24 hours a day to 'control behaviour'. Most young people felt that the cluster model of young people's flats at the Southdeen Complex was quite successful, although the flats were in need of re-decoration. They were particularly enthusiastic about having their own flat and not having to share with anyone. They also commented that the security alarms and lights made them feel safer.

However, there were several complaints about Southdeen. First, young people felt under the constant threat of eviction:

John (18): 'They could chip us oot whenever they want, know whit I mean.'

Sandra (18): 'They could come in and kick us oot right noo.'

Their second concern related to privacy. Residents in Southdeen had to hand their keys in when leaving the building and the staff sometimes checked their flats. However, young people felt strongly that spot checks should be done in their presence. Joan (17) alleged that when she was away for a week visiting her aunt Southdeen staff had been in her flat: 'They never had any reason tae search ma

flat, they just like daein their nosey.' Liz (17) added: 'They invade your privacy a lot, going through your drawers.'

Third, young people objected to the 'thousand rules' in Southdeen. They particularly hated having to sign visitors in and out and the requirement that they leave before 11pm. John (18) commented: 'It's getting more like a jail.'

Fourth, there were complaints about the behaviour of other residents, who for example played loud music or banged on doors in the middle of the night. There was clearly a fear of being burgled by other residents. Sandra (18) told me: 'There's been a lot of flats tanned in here, and I keep feelin "Oh, mine is gonnae be next."' However, young people in Southdeen did seem to cope better with these problems than those in the HAC or other hostels because at least they had their own flat and they knew most of their fellow residents.

Many of these criticisms made by young people are difficult to resolve. Southdeen staff had to maintain a tolerable communal environment, which is not easy in a building full of quite vulnerable and often disruptive young people. Residents frequently objected to rules when applied to themselves whilst at the same time wanting more control exerted over other people's behaviour. However, there are compromises which may be reached and these are discussed in Chapter 4.3. It should be emphasised that, despite these criticisms, young people very much appreciated the existence of a local facility like Southdeen. Kate (19) said of the Complex:

'I think it's a really good thing for young people. I think they should have it in every local place.'

### *The City-Wide Hostel Network*

As was discussed in Chapter 2.2, young people in Drumchapel were generally very negative about hostels outwith their local area. However, young people within the city-wide hostel network were less critical of this type of accommodation, but they drew a clear distinction between youth residential projects and adult hostels.



I will start with young persons hostels. George (18) explained why these were better than adult hostels:

'Everybody's the same age as ye, and you're gettin a lot of help in them. Big hostels are just a bed and breakfast... ye mind your ain business in them.'

He thought Stopover was the best hostel he had stayed in:

'I thought it was brilliant cause there's staff on 24 hours a day, and the staff become part of the people, part of the kids. Spend more time wi' us than anythin else. In other hostels staff just lock themselves in the office, and just stay on the phone aw day. They help you mair, because they become pally wi you. It's no like professionals against us, it's pals... [so] you tend tae trust them mair.'

This involvement of staff with the residents was clearly very important. Margaret (17) said that the staff in Kinnaird House: 'are dead friendly... they come in your room and sit and speak to you for a couple of hours, and made you feel at home an aw that.' Young people particularly appreciated the support of staff where there was a key worker system so that personal relationships could be established. Ricky (17) who stayed in Branston Court said that he liked the staff being available 24 hours because: 'You feel pretty safe.' Another advantage of youth residential projects is the opportunity to make friends and avoid the loneliness of living on your own. Jennifer (18) summed up the benefits of these types of hostels: 'aw ma friends roon aboot me... you've got the staff, the support, everythin you need.' However, many of the young people who had experienced these hostels highlighted the same issues regarding intimidation from fellow residents and fears about their belongings being stolen as were noted earlier in relation to the HAC.

The level of support varied between these youth residential projects, and some young people felt more comfortable with high levels of support than others. Bernadette (17) had been attacked in one hostel and was relieved to enter the very

supportive environment of Glengowan as she felt it was 'a safe place for me to go' because 'the staff are always around to keep an eye on everyone.' She appreciated the very intense one-on-one relationship she had with her 'personal programme co-ordinator': 'I like being close to her, she treats me like a daughter.' In contrast, Jennifer (18) resented the very protective environment of Dorothy McCall house where she stayed for a short period. She said it was like a 'prison camp' because of rules about times for coming in and the exclusion of visitors.

Adult hostels were almost universally condemned. Duncan (21) said they were 'pretty bad places' and said that he stayed in a 'cage' rather than a room in one Salvation Army hostel. Margaret (17) also described a Salvation Army hostel in Glasgow where:

'I slept on a mattress and it was aw covered in pish, crawling wi' beasties. Took ma shoes off and somebody stole ma shoes and ma jacket.'

Young people consistently said that the adult hostels were full of 'junkies'. Declan (19), who was an intravenous drug user, told me that the hostels 'dragged me down' because they act as a magnet for drug pushers:

'I want oot of here [a local authority adult hostel], that's what's keepin me on it [drugs]. If I see someone sticking a needle in their arm and I've got the money, I'll go and do it an all.'

The rapid institutionalisation of young men in adult hostels was noted in Chapter 2.2. Robert (19) had resigned himself to life in a local authority adult hostel after initial doubts:

'At first I didnae really want tae go intae a hostel, cause I didnae know whit it was gonnae be like. Ma brother said it was stinkin of piss and aw the wee junkies all over the place and "Gie us this, and gie us that." [But] this place is awright, well it's no really, but it's gonnae have to do.'



His closing comment on the hostel was: 'I'd get out of here tomorrow if I could.'

One final point is that young people who had been sleeping rough for long periods tend to be reticent about criticising any type of accommodation. Roger (19) praised the Bishopbriggs Resettlement Unit despite the extremely poor standard of dormitory accommodation provided there:

'It's great, we've got staff that'll talk to you any time you need to, we're getting fed, laundry, power, heat, you've got a bed. Everythin you need to live is here.'

Similarly, when I asked Kylie (17) what she thought of Stopover she said:

'I like this place, I'm lucky that I've got somewhere to stay. It's no really a matter of what I like the best... There are still people out on the streets, still got nowhere to stay, so I cannae complain.'

### *Mainstream/Scatter flat*

It was clear that allocating young people mainstream accommodation without support rarely provided a solution to their problems. In fact it often compounded their difficulties because when they lost the flat, either through abandoning it or by being evicted, they could find themselves treated as intentionally homeless and saddled with rent arrears.

Roger (19) was the clearest example of the futility of giving young homeless people hard-to-let properties without support. He told me that he was doing quite well until he moved into his own house, and, despite his family problems and a period of rooflessness, he had managed to hold down a job. He was accepted by a local authority as homeless and was allocated a house in a rundown area which required repairs and was vulnerable to break-ins. He lost his job while living in the house because of the impact that repeated burglaries had on his mental and physical health. He eventually left the house after his life was threatened by young men who broke in one night. He was then told by the local authority that he was

intentionally homeless and they refused to assist him any further. He was very bitter about the way the housing department had treated him:

'There was no after sales service, once I got the house they just left me. See if they had helped me, you know just to build the place up and keep in some contact, half the people who are homeless wouldnae be homeless today, because a lot of people who are homeless have had their own houses and lost them.'

In contrast, most young people in my sample who had been allocated supported scatter flats had sustained these tenancies and experienced few difficulties (see Chapter 2.4). However, there were a couple of exceptions, Margaret (17) and Alan (19), both of whom were evicted from scatter flats because the housing department suspected that they had sold the furniture. Young people who had lived in scatter flats were generally very positive about this experience (see Chapter 4.1) but there were some criticisms made. Several young people objected to the rules in scatter flats which, for example, barred overnight guests. Some also complained about their lack of security of tenure (they are only given a permanent tenancy of the flat after a trial period). Another problem which they identified with scatter flats was stigma. Mark (21) explained:

'See if it's a scatter flat, they expect trouble, "Homeless folk up there." They kinda look out for it know, so any wee bit of trouble they contact social work.'

### *Summary*

It is clear that the main priority for young people was the social environment in homeless accommodation, rather than the physical conditions. The key problem was other residents, particularly 'junkies', and this was linked to concerns about personal safety and security of belongings. Young people were positive about receiving support from staff, and appreciated help with both emotional and practical matters. They were in favour of 24 hour staffing because it made them feel secure, and the key worker system was praised because young people



appreciated having a personal relationship with a member of staff. It appeared to be important that staff mixed in an informal way with residents.

Giving vulnerable young people tenancies in difficult-to-let areas with no support generally exacerbated rather than resolved their problems, as they often lost these houses and found themselves saddled with rent arrears and labelled intentionally homeless. In contrast, scatter flats seemed to offer a positive housing intervention for these young people and most were able to sustain these tenancies. However, concerns were voiced by some of the young people in scatter flats about lack of security of tenure, stigma and harassment by neighbours.

### **Health and Police Services**

I did not systematically investigate young people's experiences of these services but there are a couple of important points which emerged in the course of the research.

First, two young women who were sleeping rough in Glasgow city centre had the experience of being discharged from the casualty departments of hospitals without staff there making any attempt to put them in touch with appropriate agencies. One was Kylie (17) whose biography is presented in Chapter 2.2. The other was Margaret (17). When she was 16 years old she was sleeping rough and miscarried because of her drug use. She told me: 'They took me to hospital, cleaned me out, then I walked the streets again.' I asked if the hospital tried to find out where she was going to stay:

'They never do that. I was in the hospital once or twice with collapsing on the streets. They just sent me back out onto the streets again.'

It is clearly unacceptable that any public service should come into contact with destitute young people and not even attempt to contact the relevant agencies.

In relation to the police service, young people consistently highlighted what they viewed as police harassment. One group of young women complained that they were harassed every time they entered Bearsden:

Karen (17): 'It's no nice, it's: "C'mere you, where do you come fae?" Say "Drumchapel" it's: "Get back tae your ain area, that's scumland."'

Vicky (17): 'It's automatically assumed that you're up there tae break in.'

Young people who were homeless in the city centre also complained about police harassment. Paul (18) told me:

'When I was kippin in a car we aw got a dig off the cops and he said: "If I see you in here again I'm gonnae boot utter shite out of you" basically. See when you're homeless the polis don't give a toss what they say because you cannae do anythin anyway.'

It must be borne in mind that the criminal activities of many homeless young people mean that the police may have good cause to arrest them. However, it seems a wasted opportunity for a public service to come into regular contact with destitute young people and serve to make them feel even more victimised rather than assisting them.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter was intended to complement the 'private' emphasis of Chapter 3.1 with a focus on the more 'public' aspects of young homeless people's lives. It reviewed their experience of education, the labour market and a range of public services. The final part of the thesis will turn to consider possible solutions to the problems faced by young homeless people.



## **PART 4**

### **THE SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS**

## **CHAPTER 4.1: YOUNG HOMELESS PEOPLE'S NEEDS AND PREFERENCES**

### **Introduction**

This chapter draws together themes from throughout the thesis by focusing upon young homeless people's needs and their housing preferences. The main purpose of this chapter is to inform the conclusions and, more especially, the recommendations of the thesis which are contained in the final two chapters.

### **Young Homeless People's Needs**

Most accounts of youth homelessness stress that young homeless people are a heterogeneous group with a diverse range of needs (Randall, 1988). However, this diversity is usually simply stated rather than substantiated with evidence. This chapter attempts to assess the needs of young homeless people in more detail. I begin by offering my own assessment of the needs of young homeless people, and then present young people's own views on their support needs and priorities for intervention. Using this information, I then analyse whether young homeless people, as a group, should be considered 'vulnerable'. The distribution of needs within the young homeless population is then considered, particularly in relation to the pathways framework developed in this thesis (see Chapter 2.2) and the length of homeless career, and the use of the concept of vulnerability to ration access to resources. The section concludes with an account of young people's views on the relevance of gender in shaping the needs of the young homeless.

### *My Assessment of Young Homeless People's Needs*

Researchers must be cautious about making assessments about people's needs on the basis of relatively brief contact. This assessment is therefore only a very general guide, and greater emphasis should be placed on young people's own accounts of their needs given next.

I identified five different types of support which young homeless people may require to sustain independent living (some of which may also be relevant to young people attempting to sustain a place in the family home):



- Material assistance
- Practical assistance
- General support and encouragement
- Emotional support
- Special support

Each of these types of support need is now explained and an assessment is given of how many young homeless people in my sample of 25 required that type of assistance.

#### Material assistance

This consists of the 'hardware' of housing, jobs and income, as well as furniture and equipment for setting up home. All 25 of my sample of young homeless people had material needs. By definition they had, or had recently had, an acute housing need. Most were unemployed, and were surviving on extremely low incomes. None of these young people had the necessary resources to furnish and equip a home without support.

#### Practical assistance

There are two types of practical assistance which may be required by young homeless people. First, they may need advice and advocacy to help them deal with bureaucracy and to gain access to resources such as housing, welfare benefits and education. Second, they may require help with living skills such as budgeting, cooking and cleaning. All 25 young people required practical support, although some were more domestically equipped and required less assistance than others.

#### General support and encouragement

Less tangible, but nevertheless crucial, is what I have termed 'general' support in helping young homeless people cope with the responsibilities of working and running their own home. This would involve advice on how to negotiate problems at work and how to adhere to acceptable standards of behaviour as a member of

the community. Just as important is simply taking an interest in a young person's progress and offering them encouragement. Of these 25 young people, 24 appeared to me to be in need of general support and encouragement.

### Emotional support

There are two overlapping types of emotional support which young homeless may require. First, they may be isolated and lonely and simply need someone to talk to, and to help them to establish a stable social base. Second, they may have specific emotional problems they require assistance with, such as relationship difficulties with their families or partners. Emotional support seemed to be needed by 19 out of these 25 young people.

### Special support needs

Some young homeless people will have additional support needs in relation to specific issues such as sexual or physical abuse, drug or alcohol dependency and mental illness. I felt that special support was required by 13 of these young people to deal with such problems.

To summarise, out of a group of 25:

- 13 young people required all five types of support
- 5 required only material, practical, general and emotional support
- 6 seemed to require only material, practical and general support
- 1 seemed to require only material assistance and a little practical help

## *Young Homeless People's Views on Their Needs*

### The Priority: Material Assistance

Most of my sample laid greatest stress on their need for the material resources of jobs, money and housing. The majority of these young people, whether they wanted to return to the family home or to live independently, said that gaining access to employment and a reasonable income was the main key to resolving



their problems. For those who wished to set up their own home, the need for appropriate accommodation was the next most important priority. Thus the typical order of priorities was that expressed by John (18): 'Good job, good money and a different hoose.'

However, some young people in the most desperate situations, such as sleeping rough or living in adult hostels, gave clear priority to finding 'somewhere permanent to live'. Keith (17), who was sleeping rough in Drumchapel, said his most important needs were: 'a hoose tae go tae, money in ma pocket tae get somethin tae eat.'

#### Additional Support Needs

The majority of young people I met were also quite clear that they would want various types of additional support if they moved into their own home. Only 7 young people out of the 25 - 5 of these were young men - stated that they would rather just be left alone. The young people who did not wish support tended to be very distrustful of adults because they had been badly let down in the past. Denny (17) told me:

'I don't really want tae take help from agencies, cause they'll probably give me help and then I'll accept it and then the next minute something will happen. Like ma job, I had a good job, then suddenly somebody pulled oot and ma job was finished. I started tae accept too much then or something like that. Or just like when I was in care and I had tae leave. Just like if I took help fae somebody, then somethin happened and then I be right back tae square one.'

The four other types of support (in addition to material) were represented in the comments of the remaining 18 young people.

The type of practical support most often highlighted by young people was assistance in helping them to deal with public services, particularly sorting out

their social security benefits. Gerard (17) gave the example of reporting repairs to the housing department:

‘They [support workers] seem be able tae dae the job better because they've got a better phone manner... they [housing officers] think you're a silly wee boy and ye don't know whit you're talkin aboot.’

The need for this type of support seemed to stem both from young people's lack of experience in dealing with these systems, and the attitude of those working in public services who tended to take adult professionals more seriously.

Some young people also mentioned the need for help with living skills. However, most asserted very firmly that they knew how to cook and clean, and their main need was for help with budgeting and coping with bills. Fraser (19) explained the difficulties he had budgeting:

‘Bills come in and your electricity gets cut off, or your gas gets cut off, cause you don't know how tae manage your ain money.’

The difficulties these young people experienced with budgeting arose not only from their inexperience, but also because of the extremely low income they had to manage on.

The need for general support and encouragement was mentioned by a number of young people. Gerard (17) told me that when he moved into his own flat: ‘It would be nice tae know that somebody is still thinkin aboot ye, come roon and see how am gettin on.’ Similarly, Roger (19) said that he may have been able to sustain his tenancy if he had been given:

‘A bit of moral back-up, you know saying "You're doing well." Or maybe even helpin you, cause I mean when you're 16/17 in a hoose you don't have a clue whit's tae be done.’



Problems of loneliness and isolation were repeatedly highlighted by young people, particularly in relation to living on their own. Sandra (18) said:

‘It’d be hard for me tae stay by maself... you’d be depressed, dead lonely. Like, knowing here that you can go oot [Southdeen] and chap somebody’s door; you wouldnae be able tae dae that in your ain hoose.’

Young people’s emotional difficulties often arose from a feeling of rejection by their families of origin. Kylie (17), for example, wanted help to: ‘sort oot problems wi’ ma family.’ Young people also needed support to deal with the trauma of being homeless. Jennifer (18) said that when she first left home what she most needed was: ‘just support really, to help me cope with the fact that I was homeless.’

Special support needs were highlighted by a number of young people. For example, George (18) emphasised the need to overcome his drug dependency. A place in a unit in Aberdeen had been found for him but:

‘It’s only for a week, it’s nae use tae me, I need somethin long-term. Somebody I can go and talk tae, somebody that’ll try and ease me aff the drugs.’

Kate (19) said that she needed support to come to terms with the physical abuse she had suffered: ‘I’ve had a really bad time, just I know it’s there and it’s scarred me.’ She confided in her keyworker in Southdeen and found this helpful:

‘Suddenly I started writing aboot it [the abuse]. It took a lot out of me. Like, wow, I can dae this, I can let somebody know that this has happened tae me.’

Young people also commented upon the manner in which support should be delivered to them. They generally welcomed visits from support workers as long as they made appointments, but were less comfortable with surprise visits. They

objected to other people having keys to their house, particularly if they let themselves in when they weren't there. Margaret (17) told me:

'I had a furnished flat in Townhead and I had ma boyfriend staying wi' me, the social work didnae know this. The housing officer had her ain key and walked in the hoose, so I felt dead unsafe in that hoose.'

There were a range of views expressed by young people about who should provide them with support. George (18) said that he would like to receive support from:

'A normal person, somebody that knows whit you're talkin about. No so much a professional, just somebody that's got time to listen, somebody I could become pally wi'.'

Kylie (17) took this theme further by suggesting that ex-homeless young people should be involved in offering support:

'Somebody who has already been through it... [so they can say] "Right this is where I went wrong", and you know what the other person is going through so they can help them out.'

Geraldine (16) strongly preferred support to be given by social work rather than housing staff:

'A social worker could turn roon and say "You're no lookin efter this right" and try and get everythin done. Housing [officers] wouldnae, "You're no looking efter it right, oot you go." And you're back to square one.'

This is an important point about the conflicts created by the same agency both managing housing and providing support. However, given the discussion in Chapter 3.2, it seems that some young people may object to social workers providing support. We return to these issues in Chapter 4.3.



### *Are Young Homeless People Vulnerable?*

The concept of 'vulnerability' is often employed in discussions about young homeless people's needs, but it is seldom explored. The main exception is Hutson and Liddiard (1994) who investigated the use of the term by youth homelessness agencies in Wales. They discovered a dichotomy whereby some agencies portrayed young homeless people as on the whole 'ordinary', having a need only for accommodation, whereas others maintained that they were an especially 'vulnerable' group with additional problems.

They found that the 'normalising' approach was usually taken by agencies offering a universal service, such as campaigning for better access to mainstream services. In contrast, agencies which offered a more selective service often emphasised the problematic nature of their clients. Hutson and Liddiard also found that those in the management or publicity side of agencies tended to stress the normality of the young homeless, whereas (p.115):

'...workers on the ground and in close contact with homeless youngsters and runaways appeared to find it hard to maintain this view of ordinariness... when the control of crime, drug use or violent behaviour is often part of their day to day work.'

As Hutson and Liddiard highlight, agencies working with young homeless people face a dilemma. If they present young homeless people as ordinary they may undermine the case for special intervention and funding. On the other hand, approaches which emphasise the vulnerability of the young homeless may attract sympathy and funding, but run the risk of stigmatising them as an inadequate group. However, the vulnerability of young homeless people is an important issue which must be explicitly addressed as it has profound implications for the type of responses which are appropriate.

Therefore, given the above analysis of the needs of my sample of young homeless people, should they be considered, on the whole, as ordinary or vulnerable? It is important to clarify the relationship between different kinds of needs and the

implication of vulnerability. A young person's requirement for material assistance carries no implication about their vulnerability or capabilities. Practical and general support are required by *all* young people because of their youth and inexperience. There is nothing exceptional about needing this sort of help, and it is the sort of assistance which 'good parents' normally provide. If young homeless people are unable to rely on this family support they should be considered vulnerable because of the *circumstances* they find themselves in, rather than because they have special *characteristics* or are any less capable than other young people. In contrast, the last two types of support needs do turn on the personal characteristics of young homeless people who require emotional support because they are socially vulnerable, or need specialist support because they have been damaged by their experiences.

Therefore, based on the criterion set out above, these young homeless people are, as a group, vulnerable. In addition to the needs which ordinary young people have for material, practical and general assistance, most needed emotional support and about half appeared to require special support.

However, acknowledging that most young homeless people are vulnerable does not mean that we can attribute their homelessness solely to their personal characteristics, nor can we conclude that society may be exonerated from blame for their situation. First, as is discussed below, it is often the experience of homelessness which creates or exacerbates these additional problems. Second, as was argued in Chapter 1.2, youth homelessness is the consequence of a range of social and economic trends in society which have marginalised young people. These disadvantaged young people are likely to be the first to suffer in the face of adverse social forces, and thus are most vulnerable to homelessness (see also Chapter 3.1). But most would have been able to avoid homelessness had society made the effort to mitigate the impact of these structural trends, and provided appropriate safety nets.

One more point to note before we leave this topic is that it is not always the most vulnerable young people, in the sense of having suffered the most extreme trauma, who are likeliest to fail in a tenancy. For example, a young person who has been



sexually abused may be able to sustain a tenancy because he or she is responsible and domestically equipped to cope with independent living, although they have continuing special support needs. On the other hand, a young person who has had a less traumatic background but lacks the maturity or practical skills to cope with a tenancy may find it more difficult to sustain independent living.

### *The Distribution of Needs Within the Young Homeless Population*

Most other studies of youth homelessness have implied that the complexity of young people's support needs can generally be gauged from the length of time they have been homeless, and the experience of homelessness itself is the most important factor shaping those needs (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1994; Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). I also found that the additional problems young people faced were very often created or exacerbated by their experience of homelessness.

The clearest example is Roger (19) who appeared to have been transformed from a capable and independent young man into a very vulnerable individual by his experience of homelessness. Whilst sleeping on the streets he became involved in crime and heavy drinking, and he was so depressed whilst living in an adult hostel that he began injecting heroin. He has developed asthma and bronchitis as a direct result of prolonged rough sleeping: 'I'm 19 and ma respiratory system has had it already.'

Margaret (17) also developed alcohol and drug dependencies to help her cope with living on the streets:

'Got into the habit of taking drugs oot on the street - everybody does it... it's cause they feel sorry for themselves being oot on the streets, nuthin else tae dae.'

Thus there will often be a connection between the period of time someone has been homeless and the additional support they require. However, there is no simple relationship between length of homeless career and level of support needs. This is for two reasons. First, young people start off in fundamentally different positions at the beginning of their homeless careers. Some may have had

relatively stable lives until then, whilst others are already very damaged by their childhood environment. It emerged very clearly from the biographical interviews that events which predate homelessness may be as important in shaping young people's needs as the experience of homelessness itself. Second, as discussed in Chapter 2.3, some pathways through homelessness appear to have a more destructive influence than others. Therefore we must consider not only the length, but also the nature, of young people's experience of homelessness.

This brings us to the question of the usefulness of the pathways framework developed in this thesis in predicting young homeless people's needs. As the subgroups identified were based on geographical patterns of movement and accommodation types, they had no necessary connection with the level and complexity of young people's support needs. But in practice the maturity of young people, and their level of additional problems, did vary between pathways.

Every one of the city centre homeless (Pathway 6) and young people in adult hostels (Pathway 5) had complex emotional and special support needs. These were the most vulnerable groups of young homeless people. They all had very traumatic childhoods and particularly harrowing experiences of homelessness. Most young people in the city-wide youth network (Pathway 5) also had the full range of support needs, but there were a couple of youngsters in this group who appeared to require only emotional rather than special forms of support.

In contrast, most young people on the local area pathways involving unofficial homelessness (Pathways 1 and 2), though there were some exceptions, did not appear to have particular emotional or special support needs. These young people generally still had access to family networks in their local area and did not seem to be, relatively speaking, particularly damaged. The emphasis for this group was rather on the need for general support and encouragement as they were often quite immature and passive young men, and their families did not always provide this constructive support. Pathway 3 contained a mixed group of young people. Some resembled those on Pathways 1 and 2, needing general rather than emotional or special support, while others seemed fairly responsible and mature young people who only required help with practical and/or emotional problems.



The tentative conclusion I therefore reached was that there was an intensification of young people's needs across the spectrum from Pathways 1 to 6, with the exception of Pathway 3. The typology may therefore be helpful in indicating at a broad level the key needs of different groups within the young homeless population, but it cannot, nor could any typology, predict a particular individual's needs.

### *Young Homeless People's Needs and Agency Assessments*

One more issue which should be highlighted at this point is the use of the concept of vulnerability to ration access to resources such as hostel places. Hutson and Liddiard (1994) argued that homelessness agencies often categorised potential clients as 'deserving' or 'undeserving' according to the 'risk' they represented. They explained (p.118):

'... the term 'low risk' was given to those youngsters whose problems were deemed insufficient to warrant the resources and intervention of the particular agency. On the other hand, 'high risk' was so severe and so extreme that the project or hostel simply could not cope with them. In fact, it appeared that agencies tended to target their resources to the middle, deserving, group.'

In particular, they noted that many youth residential projects excluded drug users or young people with a history of violence. This research did not study the selection criteria of hostels for young homeless people but it became apparent that Hutson and Liddiard's findings were equally applicable in Scotland. Most of the youth residential projects excluded young people with psychiatric, behavioural or drug problems on the basis that they did not have the resources to deal with them. However, project staff often admitted that such problems were very common amongst young homeless people and therefore they may be excluding a large group, perhaps even the majority, of those who needed their services.

Many people working with the young homeless in Glasgow said that there was a desperate need for services to deal with the 'high risk' groups, particularly 'wet'

projects for those with drug or alcohol dependencies who were not yet prepared to enter a rehabilitation programme. The lack of such provision was the main reason why so many intravenous drug users ended up in adult hostels, as these were the only places willing to accept them.

### *Young Homeless People's Needs: The Significance of Gender*

Most young people did not feel that public services treated young women and young men differently. However, there was a strong feeling amongst young men that young homeless women *should* be given a higher priority by public services. As Fraser (19) said: 'I'm a man, and I think lassies should get more priority when they're homeless' and Jon (18) said: 'I would rather sleep on the streets than have a lassie homeless.' This was because they felt that girls would encounter more problems being homeless than boys, and could be prey to men taking advantage of them or luring them into prostitution.

Some young men felt that rooflessness was a particular problem for girls because:

Iain (18): 'They need to stay more hygenically clean or somethin. It doesnae look right, a lassie lookin rough, her hair's no brushed and her makeup hasnae been changed for 3 days or whatever, it doesnae look right. But a boy can get away wi' it.'

Stuart (17): 'It doesnae look right, a lassie lying about in closes.'

These sentiments could be interpreted as a genuine concern about the additional problems faced by homeless young women. Equally, it may be viewed as a sexist and paternalistic attitude based on the macho image of sleeping rough. It also seems that the sight of homeless women is offensive because it defies the stereotype of the clean and well presented young woman. We can see again here a preoccupation with women's sexuality similar to the findings of Watson and Austerberry (1986).

### *Summary*

This section has demonstrated that young homeless people have a wide range of needs in addition to a simple requirement for accommodation. Young people gave



the greatest priority to securing employment and appropriate housing, but the majority also wanted additional support. The types of support they most frequently highlighted were assistance with budgeting and dealing with bureaucracy, general encouragement, and emotional support to help with family problems and loneliness.

These support needs do suggest that young homeless people are generally a vulnerable group. The experience of homelessness often exacerbates young people's additional problems, but events which predate homelessness can also crucially shape their support needs. There appears to be a general intensification of young homeless people's needs between Pathway 1 and Pathway 6, with the exception of Pathway 3. Specialised hostel provision for young homeless people appears to exclude the most and least vulnerable groups, often leaving them to seek refuge in the far less appropriate adult hostel network. Some young men felt that young homeless women should be given priority by public services because they were particularly vulnerable when roofless.

### **Housing Preferences**

This section examines young people's accommodation preferences. This is explored in detail as, aside from employment, young people identified appropriate accommodation as the most important resource they needed. The topics covered include the type of accommodation (mainstream or transitional) preferred by young people, how they feel about sharing accommodation, and their views on tenure and location.

#### *Previous Research*

Published research on youth homelessness tends not explore young people's housing aspirations or preferences in any depth. Anderson *et al* (1993) investigated the housing preferences of single homeless people of all ages and found that the vast majority wanted self-contained accommodation, typically a one bedroomed flat.

A number of studies have demonstrated that most young people reject hostel type accommodation and express a strong preference for dispersed, self-contained

accommodation with support if they require it (EKOS, 1994; Gilchrist and Jeffs, 1995). For example, one survey concerned with foyers found that only 6 per cent of young people who had left home wanted to live in a hostel (although 36 per cent were living in one when interviewed), and only 3 per cent of those still living at home expected to live in a hostel and none wanted to do so (Snape, 1992).

Shelter published a survey of the housing expectations of 525 young people in Scotland aged between 14 and 19 years old which provides a useful point of comparison with my sample (Shelter (Scotland), 1994). The type of housing which was most widely expected by the young people who responded to Shelter's survey (44% of respondents) was college accommodation, although only 15 per cent expressed a preference for living in this sector. This result was linked to the fact that around half of these young people (51%) expected to leave home to take up a place at college or university.

Only 5 per cent of respondents to the Shelter survey said that they would prefer to move into a council house when they left home, and only 15 per cent expected this to happen. The largest group of young people (50%) preferred to move immediately into owner-occupation on leaving home, but only 6 per cent expected to be able to do so. A quarter of young people preferred to become private renters and the same proportion expected to enter this tenure.

Interestingly, 33 per cent of these young people expected to leave home to live with friends, 20 per cent with other students, and 14 per cent expected to live alone. Only 13 per cent expected to live with a partner in their first independent home.

### *Mainstream or Transitional Accommodation?*

The first point to note was that not all the young people in my sample of 25 were interested in any type of independent accommodation. Several young men were quite clear that they wanted to return to, or remain in, their parents' house (see Chapter 3.1) Amongst those who did wish to move into independent accommodation the overwhelming preference was for some sort of transitional arrangements rather than moving straight into a mainstream house. Furnished



scatter flats were generally preferred to residential projects because they offered greater independence, control and privacy - essential elements of young people's conception of 'home' highlighted in Chapter 2.1. Ricky (17) summed up why young people wanted a scatter flat rather than mainstream accommodation:

'You've got the furniture there, and you're still gettin that wee bit of help, still gettin that wee bit of advice.'

Young people were very clear that furniture was essential for them to be able to take up a tenancy. Joan (18) said:

'I got the scatter flat cause I never had any money tae furnish it. So it was my only option. I couldnae have walked into a hoose wi' nuthin in it.'

Some young people seemed to view the scatter flats as their permanent home, whereas others emphasised that this was simply a stepping stone to their own unfurnished tenancy. For example, John (18) explained:

'I don't think it's your ain hoose when their stuff's in it... I'd like to stay in that hoose [scatter flat] for aboot 2 years, get a good job, save money and move intae another hoose - ma ain hoose, dae it up.'

This preference for furnished accommodation is clearly linked to the difficulties which young people now face securing lump sums payments from the Social Fund to buy their own furniture. A couple of young people commented that, ideally, they would rather 'get a hoose and a grant at the same time' (Robert (19)). Sandra (18), who was in care after age 16, said that she would prefer to get S24 money and furnish a mainstream tenancy herself: 'knowin that it would be mine, that everythin in the flat would be mine.' These comments reflect the importance of personalisation of space for young people trying to establish their own home (discussed in Chapter 2.1).

A number of young people wanted to remain in the more supported environment of a youth residential project a longer period, and then move onto a scatter flat or mainstream tenancy. For example Sandra (18) wanted to stay in Southdeen for a further year to get 'a bit more confidence' before moving into 'a real house.' These young people highlighted the sort of emotional and practical difficulties of independent living which were discussed earlier.

### *Sharing Accommodation*

Almost all of these young people were quite firm that they did not want to share accommodation, except with a partner in the longer-term. Morag (18) summed up their feelings: 'cause then it'll be ma hoose, naebody else's.' Caroline (17) explained the sense of security she gained from having a place to herself:

'I don't have to worry aboot who's gonnae come in the room and nick ma stuff, it's just mine, it's a good feeling you get.'

John (18) explained why he would share with a girlfriend but not with friends:

'If friends move in wi' ye, come in drunk and probably start carrying on, and smashing things up. Wi' a lassie it's different, I think it controls you.'

Jennifer (18) was the only young person to express a preference for sharing accommodation. She said that she wouldn't want to move into a flat on her own because 'I wouldnae be able to cope with the boredom.' Other young people will also face loneliness and boredom living alone, as many of them acknowledged, but clearly this is a price that they are willing to pay for the privacy and security afforded by having their own place.

These young people's reluctance to share housing is understandable given the insecurity and bad experiences they have suffered. They don't have the confidence to take a chance on sharing with people. Furthermore, amongst working class people there is no tradition of unrelated people sharing accommodation. Jones (1995a) has argued that there may be a growing phenomenon of house sharing by



young workers living away from home, and this seems to be supported by the high proportion of young people in the Shelter (Scotland) (1994) report who expected to live with friends when they left home. However, it seems that these trends have not as yet touched the least advantaged.

### *Tenure of Housing*

I did not specifically ask young people about their preferred housing tenure, but it was clear from their comments that the height of their housing aspirations was usually a 'decent' council or housing association house. There were a small number of young people who did mention that they would like a 'bought house' in the longer-term. However, most of these young people felt, like Vicky (17), that the tenure was not important as long as it was 'a nice house in a nice area.' On the other hand, as has been noted already in Chapter 2.1, young people placed a great deal of emphasis on their security and permanence of their housing tenure.

These findings contrast sharply with the findings of the Shelter survey where a high proportion of young people expressed a preference for owner-occupation, and very few preferred or expected to be public sector tenants. The fact that most of these disadvantaged young people assumed that they would become council tenants probably reflects the limited nature of their experiences, and perhaps a realistic assessment of their opportunities.

### *Location of Accommodation*

Given the previous discussions in this thesis, it will come as no surprise that most young people expressed a strong desire to be housed in their local area. Young people often stipulated, however, that they wanted a house in a 'decent' and 'quiet' part of the scheme. For example, Keith (17) said:

'I wouldnae mind a hoose in the Drum but it depends what area  
but. I wouldnae go doon tae Drummore cause its full of junkies.  
Full of junkies hingin aboot and you end up gettin your hoose

done... They're awright doon there [another area of the scheme],  
they're quiet.'

Young people were sometimes even more specific:

Gerard (17): 'There's no one area that you like to live in, it's streets  
you want tae live in cause its that bad. Bad street or a good street,  
or a quiet street...'

Liz (17): 'And the closes as well, its similar wi' the closes.'

In relation to their long-term future, young people were split between those who wished to remain in Drumchapel and those who wished to leave. For example, many felt like John (18) who wanted to live in Drumchapel '...for the moment. But in a few years I'd like to move oot of Drumchapel' to somewhere 'better'. On the other hand, some agreed with Iain (18) who said: 'If I was a millionaire, I'd buy a close or somethin, but I wouldnae move oot of Drumchapel.'

The same set of factors relating to social networks, familiarity and physical safety were emphasised by young people in relation to their housing preferences as were used to explain their decision to remain within their local area when homeless (see Chapter 2.2). However, it seemed to me that they were both more choosy and more adventurous about where they wanted to live in their own permanent home, than they were about homeless or transitional accommodation. They had a greater interest in 'bettering' themselves at this stage, whereas at the crisis point when they were young and homeless their top priority was the security of remaining in a familiar community. Young people were quite clear, however, that if the choice was between Drumchapel and another 'bad' area then they would much prefer to stick with the 'devil they know'.

### *Summary*

Young people clearly recognise the need for measured steps to independence, both in their preference for transitional accommodation and in their acknowledgment of their support needs outlined in the first section of the chapter. The general preference was for furnished scatter flats, but there were young people who



wanted to spend a period in a youth residential project before moving onto more independent accommodation. Some young people viewed scatter flats as permanent homes, whilst others saw them as a stepping stone to a mainstream house. Security of tenure seemed more important than the type of housing tenure to these young people, with most presuming that they would ultimately become council tenants. Sharing accommodation with anyone other than a partner was almost universally rejected. Most young people wanted a house in their local area initially, but many young people stipulated that they would only consider a 'decent' part of the scheme. Some young people wished to move onto a 'better' area in the longer-term.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored young people needs for material and other types of assistance, and has explored their housing preferences in detail. This forms an important backdrop to the conclusions and policy recommendations presented in the remainder of this final section of the thesis.

## **CHAPTER 4.2: CONCLUSIONS**

### **Introduction**

This thesis sought to illuminate the processes of youth homelessness by exploring the experiences of young people from a peripheral housing scheme in Glasgow called Drumchapel. The research focused upon the 'pathways' through homelessness taken by young people aged 16 to 19 years old (inclusive) in order to investigate the existence of distinct subgroups within the young homeless population. Comparisons were made between the experiences of young men and young women throughout the thesis. A holistic approach was taken in the research so that young people's experiences of homelessness were placed in the context of their lives as a whole. Therefore both their 'private lives' of family and friendship networks and their 'public lives' of work, school and contact with public services were explored. The most significant findings are outlined below.

### **Unemployment and Benefit Cuts : The Key To Youth Homelessness**

It is important to begin by considering the roots of homelessness amongst young people. It is clear that the causes of youth homelessness are to be found in the multitude of social, economic and policy changes in recent years which have marginalised young people as a group. However, unemployment, compounded by benefit changes, did seem to be the single most important factor underlying the problems of the young people I interviewed. This is not to say that housing and support issues were not also important, but most (though by no means all) of these young people could have avoided homelessness if they had a job or at least a realistic prospect of getting one. If this had been the case, many would have found it much easier to remain in the family home until they were ready to embark on independent living. Those who would still have had to leave would have been in a much stronger position to secure their own home or to negotiate a place in another household.

Young people themselves stressed that getting a job was the key to resolving their difficulties. It may be that in other areas such as London with a crude shortage of housing, accommodation issues eclipse those of employment, but for these young



people in Glasgow unemployment seemed to be the principal factor underlying their homelessness.

Unemployment is also at the root of other problems encountered by young homeless people. Joblessness leads to boredom and frustration which some young men deal with by becoming involved in crime, often using the proceeds to buy drugs. A vicious circle is created whereby their involvement in crime and drugs tends to increase when they are homeless, and at the same time engaging in these activities makes it even more difficult for them to secure a stable home. There were some young men in my sample who appeared fatalistic about the prospect of prison because they were unemployed and had a sense of hopelessness about the future.

The current high levels of youth unemployment would not have had such a devastating impact were it not for the accompanying cuts in social security benefits to under-25s. Young people themselves felt that the benefits system was unfair and objected strongly to the notion that they could rely on their parents to support them when they were unemployed. Those living at home usually presumed that they were not entitled to benefits, and many were evicted, at least in part, because they had no income and therefore could not pay dig money. It seems that the middle class expectation about supporting children for an extended period into early adulthood cannot be - or at least is not - being accepted by many poorer families. The situation of those living away from home with no income was even more desperate, and some resorted to begging and crime in order to survive, or faced periods of starvation.

Almost all the young people in my sample who applied for severe hardship payments did so with the assistance of helping agencies. Young people staying in youth residential projects or adult hostels had all received severe hardship payments, but it was less common for those living at home or with friends and relatives, and none of these young people had gained this benefit whilst sleeping rough. Many who did secure severe hardship payments found their benefit disrupted because they had failed to re-apply, had missed an appointment at the Careers Service or had refused a training place. In some cases this precipitated

further episodes of homelessness. Even those over 18 found it difficult to survive on the lower rate of IS (now JSA). The unemployment trap created by the steep HB taper (the rate at which benefit is deducted as income rises) was a significant problem for these young people, and particularly affected those in living in supported and/or furnished accommodation where rents are often very expensive.

The main experience of the labour market of the young people in my sample was YT, which was the government training scheme for 16 and 17 year olds in operation at the time of the fieldwork. Most had failed to complete their YT placements for various 'negative' reasons. Echoing the findings of previous research (such as SPA, 1992), I found that young people condemned YT as 'slave labour' because of the low wage rates, the poor quality of training, lack of choice over placements, and poor job prospects on completion. However, there was some acknowledgement that the quality of YTs was variable, and young people had a clear preference for the work placement part of YT and disliked the college sessions.

Instead of YT, young people wanted a 'decent' job, by which they meant full-time employment with a reasonable wage, but their income aspirations were very modest. They identified a series of obstacles to finding such a job, the most important being their lack of qualifications and experience. Some young people also felt that they were discriminated against because they came from a deprived area. Several young men highlighted the shift in the labour market towards 'female' jobs and felt that this left them at a disadvantage. At the same time, young women complained that traditional male occupations were not open to them. A few young men had applied to enter the army to escape unemployment, but only one had been accepted.

There was little evidence of a workshy 'underclass' (Murray, 1990) in the accounts of these young people who stressed very heavily their desire to work, although they sometimes accused others of not wanting a job. They wanted to work to alleviate boredom; to give their lives a sense of purpose; to gain a reasonable income which would enable them to participate in social activities; and to gain



self-respect and respect from others, particularly from their parents. All of the points in this section are elaborated upon in Chapter 3.2.

### **The Experience of Homelessness: Definitions, Processes and Subgroups**

Part 2 of the thesis explored the experience of homelessness. I began by discussing the meaning of home and homelessness to these young people (see Chapter 2.1). The main conclusion was that social and psychological dimensions of homelessness must be acknowledged in research and policy, and the debate must not be limited to simple accommodation issues. However, a practicable definition of homelessness must necessarily focus upon housing circumstances. A home to homelessness continuum was constructed based on young people's views as to whether particular housing circumstances constituted homelessness or having a home. Rooflessness, moving around friends' and relatives' houses and staying in hostels was defined as homelessness. Young people who were staying in their own mainstream or furnished flat or in their parents' house were considered to have a home. The key point for these young people seemed to be the security of their right to stay in their accommodation.

The principal aim of the research was to explore whether patterns could be identified in the ways in which young people dealt with their homelessness. I found that there were distinct subgroups within the young homeless population which followed different pathways through homelessness. This finding contrasts with previous research which has implied that there is one main, progressively problematic career through homelessness (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1994; Hutson and Liddiard, 1994).

A framework of 6 pathways was developed based on three key variables in relation to young people's routes through accommodation types (see Chapter 2.2). These were the location and stability of young people's accommodation, and its status as 'official' (provided by public or voluntary agencies) or 'unofficial' (informal arrangements with friends and relatives or sleeping rough). This typology was developed mainly from biographical interviews with 25 young homeless people, and is therefore intended to be exploratory and hypothesis generating:

Pathway 1: Unofficial homelessness in the local area

Pathway 2: Alternating between the official network in the local area and unofficial homelessness in the local area

Pathway 3: Stable within the official network in the local area

Pathway 4: Alternating between unofficial homelessness in the local area and the city-wide official network

Pathway 5: Staying within the city-wide official network

Pathway 6: City centre homeless (moving between sleeping rough in city centre and city-wide official network)

Each of these pathways is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.2. The city centre homeless (Pathway 6) represent the stereotypical image of youth homelessness. However, the most important finding of my research is that this is only one facet of a far broader pattern of youth homelessness, much of which is 'hidden' in local communities like Drumchapel. The key motivational factor determining young people's routes through homelessness was their level of attachment to their local territory. This 'territoriality' was strongest on Pathway 1 and generally weakened across the spectrum to Pathway 6, but it was the overriding concern of most of the young people I met. Key points in relation to each specific pathway are summarised below.

Young people unofficially homeless in their local area (Pathway 1) were the most interesting group because their homelessness was the most hidden and least well-researched in previous studies. There was a strong pattern of young people moving around friends' and relatives' houses in Drumchapel, and many more young people had slept rough in their local area than in the city centre. This offers some evidence that young people in these circumstances form the largest group of the young homeless population.

There were three inter-related reasons why these young people chose to stay in their local area whilst homeless. First, their social networks were concentrated there; second, they gained a sense of security from being in a familiar environment; and third, and most significantly, they were liable to be attacked in



other areas because of territorial boundaries between young people. These young people would therefore rather put up with extremely inadequate housing conditions in their local area, including sleeping rough, than use services located elsewhere, even on a very short-term basis. They generally had very limited experience of the world outside Drumchapel, and consequently it seemed terrifying to them, particularly at this very vulnerable stage in their lives.

Young people moving between official and unofficial homelessness in their local area (Pathway 2) and stable within the official network in the local area (Pathway 3) also generally felt a very strong attachment to their local neighbourhood. Several told me that they would have slept rough in Drumchapel rather than use the city-wide network of homeless accommodation. This would suggest that unofficial homelessness is likely to be even more common in areas without local accommodation services for young people. There was only one young person in my sample moving between local area unofficial homelessness and the city-wide network (Pathway 4), but this pathway may be more common in areas without local services for young homeless people.

Young people who were staying in the city-wide official network (Pathway 5) could be divided into two groups: those staying in youth residential projects and those staying in adult hostels. The intention for those living in young persons accommodation was to prepare them for independent living, and their stay in hostels was viewed as a transitional and temporary phase in their lives. Young people in the adult network, in contrast, seemed to have been dumped there on a more or less permanent basis, and in this highly institutionalised environment they had become rapidly de-skilled in the art of independent living. Young people on Pathway 5, particularly those on the adult network, risked becoming submerged in a homeless subculture entirely disconnected from ordinary communities.

The city centre homeless (Pathway 6) did not appear to represent young homeless people at the 'end of the line', as often seems to be supposed, but were in fact a quite distinct subgroup. It also seemed fairly unusual for young people to decide to sleep rough in the city centre rather in their local area which would suggest that they may constitute a relatively small proportion of the young homeless

population. The young people who opted for this city centre route did so for a number of specific reasons: they had a background of residential care through which they already knew a community of rough sleepers in the city centre; they were frightened of their family or other people in their local area; or they were 'runaways' aged under 16 who required the anonymity of the city centre.

The city centre homeless spent periods sleeping rough for a variety of reasons. Some were refused assistance by the HAC, the local authority's central homeless reception centre, because they were assessed as not homeless or intentionally homeless, and a few had been evicted by hostels and labelled 'Do Not Accommodate'. Others were runaways under 16 and therefore could not use official services, or were 'out-of-towners' whom Glasgow City Council would not accommodate. Young people on Pathway 6 were generally very damaged, and were often leading chaotic and dangerous lives. They tended to be submerged in a sub-culture of other young homeless people with similar lifestyles, and to have little connection to ordinary people with stable lives. Some were involved in a city centre homeless 'scene' which involved sleeping rough with a group of young people at night and begging for food, alcohol and drugs during the day.

It is essential to highlight the relationship between these pathways to substantiate the argument that they represent distinct subgroups in the young homeless population rather than being simply different stages in one uniform homeless career. The data indicated that the pathways are not entirely separate, as some, though by no means all, young people move from one to another in the course of their overall homelessness careers. However, there are clear patterns in these movements, summarised below, and distinctions can therefore be drawn between subgroups in the young homeless population.

Most young people did spend a short period unofficially homeless in their local area (Pathway 1) at the beginning of their homeless career. But some young people had been unofficially homeless in their local area for considerable periods without ever coming to the attention of helping agencies, and for many it seems likely to constitute their entire homeless experience.



For those who did move on from a significant period on Pathway 1 the only overlaps were with Pathways 2 or 3, that is, they became involved with the official network of accommodation in their local area. However, there may be more evidence in communities with no local accommodation network of young people moving from homelessness in their local area into the city-wide network of hostels (Pathways 4 and 5).

In this research most young people in Pathway 5 moved onto it directly, although there was some overlap with Pathway 6 (city-centre homeless) as several young people who had been roofless in the city centre settled into the city-wide hostel network. There was no evidence of young people from the local area pathways (1, 2 and 3) ever moving into patterns which involved sleeping rough in the city centre, hence a principal conclusion of the research was that a sharp distinction can be drawn between city centre and local area homelessness.

There were, however, overarching trends in homeless careers which transcended these distinct pathways. My research supports the findings of previous studies that there is a general drift away from 'domestic' accommodation, such as staying with friends and relatives, towards institutional accommodation as homeless careers lengthen (Jones, 1993a; Hutson & Liddiard, 1994). In particular, young people are more likely to find themselves in adult hostels and prison later in their homeless careers, although this may be attributed to their increasing age rather than length of time homeless. Unlike previous researchers I did not find that young people tended to sleep rough for longer periods of time or were more likely to move between cities later in their homeless careers. The city centre homeless (Pathway 6), at whatever stage, were the most likely to find themselves in these situations.

### **One Year On: Young Homeless People's Progress**

The findings on young people's progress are derived from the follow-up study one year later, and are presented in full in Chapter 2.3. The follow-up exercise was successful in obtaining some amount of information about the progress of all but 3 of the 25 young people who participated in the biographical interviews. However, this includes first-hand information from 11 young people who were re-interviewed or completed a questionnaire, and second-hand information of

varying quality about a further 11 whom I did not manage to contact directly. The main questions for this stage of the research were whether homelessness for young people is generally a short-term situation from which they move on, and whether those who remain homeless tend to find themselves in a 'downward spiral' (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). I took account of young people's own views on their progress, and made my own assessment based on their accommodation and employment circumstances and level of contact with their family of origin.

The principal finding was that homelessness appeared to constitute a 'downward spiral' for some young people but not others, and there were clear distinctions in the progress of young people who followed different pathways through homelessness. Young people on Pathway 3 had made the best progress. Their employment and housing circumstances had generally improved since the year before and they had closest contact with their families. There was a more mixed picture in relation to young people on Pathways 1 and 2: they were sleeping rough less often, but were generally still living in insecure accommodation and had made little progress with employment.

I gained less follow-up data on young people in the youth accommodation network on Pathways 4 and 5. What information I did receive suggested that they were still in insecure housing circumstances. The adult network on Pathway 5 and Pathway 6 were the most closely associated with a 'downward spiral', as the circumstances of most of these young people had significantly deteriorated over the year, or at least showed no sign of improvement. They were often still sleeping rough or living in very poor quality institutional accommodation, and had worsening physical and mental health. None of these young people had engaged in work or training over the year.

Another point to note is that young women seemed to move out of homelessness more successfully than young men, and this did not appear to be explained by the gender differences in family formation patterns summarised below (further discussion of gender in next section).



It must be emphasised that these findings are very tentative as I am working with small numbers. Furthermore, it is difficult to disentangle cause and effect in explaining the association between pathways and progress. In other words, is it the nature of the pathway or the type of young people who take it which accounts for the differential rates of progress? Nevertheless, my evidence does suggest that there are three factors which appear to aid young people's progress out of a homeless situation: remaining in an ordinary community; staying in official rather than unofficial accommodation in the local area; and being female.

### **Gender and Pathways Through Homelessness**

As was reported in Chapter 2.4, the fact that single men greatly outnumber single women in visible homeless situations has been widely attributed to the more 'hidden' nature of female homelessness (Greve, 1991; Watson with Austerberry, 1986; Daly, 1993; SCSH and Shelter (Scotland), 1994). This point is particularly salient in the context of this thesis as it relates closely to the notion of official or unofficial routes through homelessness.

The empirical study which is frequently cited to substantiate this alleged gender differentiation in routes through homelessness simply established that there was a significant problem of hidden homelessness amongst single women (Webb, 1994). It did not provide evidence that single men are any less likely to take hidden routes through homelessness, or that there are fewer hidden homeless single men than women. Quite the reverse in fact, as statistics quoted by Webb concerning single persons living 'care-of' in Glasgow would suggest that hidden homelessness is actually more prevalent amongst single men. Therefore it seems likely that there are far greater numbers of single men homeless than single women in total. However, as women head the vast majority of homeless single parents families, there may well be as many homeless women as men but they are predominantly in a different household type.

There is also an important age dimension to this debate. A variety of statistics indicate that there is a sharp tailing off in the proportion of women in the visible single homeless population with age: young women account for about half of homeless 16 and 17 year olds, about a third of homeless 18 to 24 year olds, and a

much smaller proportion of those over 25 (Anderson *et al*, 1993; SCSH and Shelter (Scotland), 1994; HAC statistics 1996). There are several possible explanations for this which are not mutually exclusive. First, young women may be more successful than young men in resolving their homelessness, as suggested by the progress data in this research. Second, they have children and thus are no longer enumerated as single homeless. This explanation is supported by the high levels of teenage pregnancy amongst disadvantaged young women. Third, young women's homelessness may become proportionately more 'hidden' than young men's as they grow older, but as has been explained above hidden homeless single men probably outnumber women throughout the age range.

The empirical data gathered in this research adds a new dimension to the debate on gender and homelessness because it suggests that there are more young men than young women taking hidden routes through homelessness. If true, this would mean that homeless young men heavily outnumber homeless young women in total. I found that young women were more likely than young men to take visible pathways through homelessness because they are more mature and willing to seek help, somewhat less afraid of territorial boundaries, and more reluctant to sleep rough.

### **Families of Origin**

The principal theme of Chapter 3.1 was the role of young people's families of origin as the cause of, and solution to, their homelessness.

My findings replicate those of previous researchers that most young homeless people had unhappy childhoods, and many were subject to a shocking level of violence in their family environments. Relationships with natural fathers, and more especially step-parents, were often poor, and sometimes brutal. Poverty and unemployment were associated with many of the tensions within these very fragile families. Thus these young people's problems were of a long-term nature, and their family environment certainly made them more vulnerable than most of their contemporaries to homelessness. It does not, however, mean that their homelessness was inevitable. If they had had access to a safe route out of the family home, or to the support they required to sustain a place in the family home



until they were better prepared to leave, they could have avoided becoming homeless.

My findings add to the considerable weight of evidence that young homeless people do not leave the parental home 'voluntarily'. They were either evicted by their parents or driven out by intolerable circumstances such as violence, continual conflict, domestic exploitation or overcrowding. Similarly, few had the option of returning home on a long-term basis. Those who had attempted to return generally found that these arrangements broke down, and their relationship with their parents was further damaged. Thus the last Government's simplistic notion that youth homelessness may be resolved by 'encouraging' young people to return to the family home is completely insupportable.

Most young homeless people did, however, attach a great deal of importance to having a good continuing relationship with at least one parent, usually their mother. Generally speaking, these relationships improved dramatically once the young person had left home, particularly if they managed to establish a stable home of their own near their family. The majority of young homeless people had received some sort of support from their parents since leaving home. Most frequently they had been given emotional support. However, small (but significant) amounts of financial and material help was also common. Young people may also be an important source of practical help to their families, and I encountered some reciprocal arrangements for loans of money. Those on the local area homelessness pathways (1, 2 and 3) tended to have a high level of contact with their parents and to have received most support, whereas those on the city-wide pathways (4, 5 and 6) were more likely to be estranged from their parents.

This role of parents as a source of support, rather than accommodation, is the crucial one we must harness in helping young people resolve their homeless situation. However, for some young homeless people relationships with their parents may be unsalvageable in any form.

There were three main findings in relation to gender and young people's relationship with their parents. First, young women were expected to do much

more housework than young men, and in some cases this amounted to exploitation. Furthermore, young women did not carry out this domestic labour in lieu of dig money, nor was it any more acceptable for them to be unemployed. Second, parents were far stricter with young women than young men, and they apparently had a far higher standard of conduct expected of them. Third, young women appeared to adopt a more confrontational style in dealing with family conflict than young men who were often passive within the home. This may have implications for young women's ability to reintegrate within the household. In any case, young women have far less to gain by remaining in the family home than young men because of the restrictions on their freedom and domestic responsibilities they face there. This may be why they are less likely to want to return.

Siblings were invariably young people's closest family relationships other than parents, and were the first people they sought accommodation from when homeless. Extended kin relationships were of far less significance, and young people only rarely mentioned receiving support or accommodation from sources such as grandparents, aunts or cousins. Several young people mentioned that their siblings or members of their extended family had also been homeless. It is probable, therefore, that homelessness 'runs' in families.

### **Friendship Networks**

As was shown in Chapter 3.1, young people's friendship networks differed significantly depending on which pathway through homelessness they took. Young people on the local area pathways of 1, 2 and 3 tended to have long-standing friends from childhood (some of whom may also have been homeless in the local area). Most of these young people had stayed with friends at some point in their homelessness career (usually their friend's parents' house). However, they found it very embarrassing and preferred to stay with family wherever possible. Young people generally only felt able to accept material help or accommodation from friends if it was on a short-term basis and they were able to repay or reciprocate the favour.



Most young people on the city-wide pathways (5 and 6) underwent a process whereby they lost old friends and replaced them with young people they met in the hostel network or through sleeping rough in the city centre. Thus their effective 'community' became the homeless scene, which is likely to make it even more difficult for them to reintegrate into mainstream society. These young people found it difficult to keep in contact with old friends, and in any case their friends with stable homes couldn't relate to their homeless situation. I explored the nature of friendships between young homeless people and found that whilst they did sometimes help each other out in practical ways, there are severe limits to the mutual support they could offer because they were all in such dire straits. Furthermore, homeless friendships tended to be transitory, and were frequently exploitative, particularly when a young person got their own house and had problems 'controlling the door'.

### **Partners and Family Formation**

There was a strong gender contrast in family formation patterns. None of the 15 young men who participated in the biographical interviews had moved in with a partner or were aware that they had a child. On the other hand, 5 out of the 10 young women had had at least one child and/or lived with a partner by the time of the follow-up study. Many of the other young people had a boyfriend or girlfriend, and some of them had got engaged.

There may be a tendency for these young people to become more involved with a partner than they otherwise would at this age as a means of seeking emotional security. It seems likely that some of these relationships are abusive. More positively, a couple of young men reported that their long-term girlfriends had 'calmed me down'. There was no evidence of young women using partners or children as a route out of homelessness, and it seemed more likely that their pregnancy was attributable to a fatalistic attitude due to their lack of hope about the future. These issues are explored in detail in Chapter 3.1.

### **School and Education**

As Chapter 3.2 documented, almost all of these young people left school as soon as they could and gained few qualifications. Most 'hated' it and had serious

problems with non-attendance and/or disruptive behaviour, and a number were suspended or expelled. The difficulties which these young people faced at home clearly lay at the root of their school problems, but truancy was not always followed up by the school nor did it necessarily lead to a social work referral.

The main problem young people identified with school related to the discipline regime and attitude of teachers. However, some young people reported a positive relationship with a particular teacher, and even the most disruptive youngsters seemed able to respond to a teacher who they felt genuinely cared about their welfare and were prepared to listen to their point of view. Many young people voiced regrets that they had not done better at school because of the difficulties they faced in the labour market, but few had considered further education as a means of improving their qualifications.

### **Experience of Social Work, Youth Services and Residential Care**

Chapter 3.2 demonstrated the high degree of social work involvement in the childhoods of my sample of young homeless people, thus replicating the findings of other research (Caskie, 1992). However, this should not be taken to imply that social work involvement 'causes' homelessness. It may be interpreted as an indication that social work services are being successfully targeted on the most vulnerable young people.

Young people were, on balance, negative about social workers on the basis that they were prying, manipulative, lazy, offered little practical help and were often inaccessible. On the other hand, some young people were positive about their contact with a particular social worker. These more constructive experiences were usually associated with a sustained personal relationship, effective practical assistance and a frank and informal approach on the part of the social worker (like the findings of Triseliotis *et al*, 1995).

The predominant feeling of young people who had been received in to residential care was overwhelming relief at escaping from their family problems, and most therefore viewed it as a positive intervention in their lives. Young people nevertheless found their experience of care traumatic. They complained about



conflicts, a lack of privacy, excessive rules, and 'bad' influences from the other young residents in the children's homes. These difficulties were often compounded by the prejudice which children in care had to contend with at school.

Young people in my sample usually left care at, or shortly before, their 16th birthdays, and most went back home to live with their parents. However, these arrangements often broke down and the young person then became homeless. Young people with experience of residential care thought that they were too young to leave at 16, although at the time some of them were desperate to go, and felt strongly that they should be able to re-enter care as a 'safety net'. These young people emphasised the need for preparation for leaving care and for 'aftercare' support, although they conceded that care-leavers may reject this assistance initially.

All of the young people in my sample were very positive about any contact they had had with Detached Youth Work in Drumchapel and the City Centre Youth Initiative. Young people often compared these outreach services favourably with social work because they were accessible, 'down to earth', offered practical assistance and spent a lot of time talking to them.

### **Experience of Housing Services**

In Chapter 3.2 I explored young people's experience of specialist accommodation services for young people such as the HAC, the Southdeen complex (youth housing project in Drumchapel), young persons and adult hostels (see Chapter 1.5 for overview of services). The main priority for young people in relation to this type of communal accommodation, other than location, was the social environment. This seemed to be far more important to them than physical conditions. The main problem was staying in the same place as other homeless people, particularly 'junkies', and this was linked to fears about personal safety and security of belongings. Young people appreciated staff support, and were generally in favour of 24 hour staffing and the key worker system. It was particularly important that staff mixed with residents in an informal way, and that young people had their own secure space within the project. Youth residential

projects (including HAC and Southdeen) were much preferred to adult hostels, which were almost universally condemned. Young people who had been sleeping rough for long periods tended to be wary about criticising any form of accommodation.

Young homeless people's experience of mainstream tenancies and furnished and supported 'scatter' flats was also investigated. Their accounts demonstrated the futility of giving very young people hard-to-let accommodation without support, and it was clear that the failure of these tenancies simply compounded their problems. Scatter flats were much more successful, but the high rents charged created an unemployment trap, and some young people complained of 'stigma' and hassle from neighbours.

### **Young Homeless People's Needs and Housing Preferences**

As was shown in Chapter 4.1, young homeless people are a generally vulnerable group with a wide range of support needs. Young people gave greatest priority to securing employment and appropriate housing, but the majority also wanted additional support, particularly with budgeting, dealing with bureaucracy and emotional problems. Young homeless people's additional problems were attributable both to their experience of homelessness, and to events which preceded it.

There appears to be a general intensification of support needs across the spectrum between Pathway 1 (unofficial homelessness in the local area) and Pathway 6 (city centre homelessness), with the exception of Pathway 3. Youth residential projects often appear to target their services on the middle band of young people who are 'deserving, but not too problematic', thus excluding the most and least vulnerable (see Hutson and Liddiard, 1994).

Most young people did not think that public services distinguished between young men and young women, but there was a strong sentiment amongst the young men that young homeless women *should* be given higher priority by public services. This was because girls were seen to be more vulnerable to exploitation and assault



when homeless, and sleeping rough was viewed as particularly inappropriate for females.

Most young homeless people wanted access to transitional accommodation as a part of a gradual pathway to independence, rather than to move directly into mainstream housing. The general preference was for a furnished scatter flat, but some young people wished to stay in the more supportive environment of a youth residential project for a period first. Security of tenure rather than type of housing tenure seemed most important to these young people, as most presumed that they would become social rented tenants. Sharing accommodation with anyone other than a partner was almost universally rejected. Most young people expressed a strong desire to be housed in a 'decent' part of their local area, although some had aspirations to eventually move to a 'better' area.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has summarised the main findings of the research. The final chapter will draw out the policy and practice implications of this study.

## **CHAPTER 4.3: RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

The findings of this research have a range of policy and practice implications. This chapter commences by setting out a series of policy principles for tackling youth homelessness. The second section discusses the value of various types of provision currently offered or proposed for young homeless people, in the light of my research findings. The third and final section considers some practice issues highlighted by the empirical research in relation to specific public services.

### **Policy Principles for Tackling Youth Homelessness**

The following are not detailed policy prescriptions but rather a broad set of principles which the present research and previous studies indicate must lie at the core of an effective strategy to tackle youth homelessness. Some principles are advanced more cautiously than others because they are based primarily on new evidence from this study.

#### *Key Approaches: Holistic, Flexible and Tolerant Services*

There are three general principles which should inform the approach of all agencies concerned with young homeless people.

First, a holistic approach must be taken by policy-makers and practitioners, which recognises the interconnections between different aspects of young people's lives. Interventions in one sphere, such as changes in employment and social security policies, may have profound impacts for other aspects of their lives, such as their position in the housing market and their family relationships.

This thesis has demonstrated the broad range of material and support needs which most young homeless people have in addition to their requirement for appropriate accommodation. We must develop integrated responses which tackle all of these key requirements, rather than relying on fragmented services which deal with one particular problem in isolation. There is little point, for example, in allocating a young person a house who does not have the income or practical skills to sustain it. Nor is it sensible to help a young homeless drug addict overcome his



dependency in a rehabilitation unit only to discharge him onto the streets again. This does not, however, mean that all of these needs should be supplied by the same agency. In fact, it is argued below that such a merger would be unhelpful. However, it does mean that the relevant services should co-ordinate their responses.

Second, agencies dealing with young homeless people must be flexible in order to respond to the diversity of needs within the young homeless population, and to the changes in individual young people's needs and capabilities over time. Youth is a transitional phase between dependent childhood and independent adulthood and services must give youngsters space in which to grow up (for example, to begin to have sexual partners and to take increasing responsibility for their own decisions). Young people's levels of need may also vary over time as a result of their experiences of homelessness, and other significant events in their lives.

Third, services must be tolerant because young people are inexperienced, make mistakes, and are often unreliable, particularly those with chaotic and difficult lives. Youth is a time for mobility and experimentation, and services must make allowances for this.

### *Early Intervention and Support for Fragile Families*

A key finding of this and other studies of youth homelessness is the long-term nature of these young people's problems. There is a need for early intervention in childhoods of vulnerable young people to avert a crisis when they reach adolescence. Thus effective support for fragile families is required, and we must develop more sensitive monitoring mechanisms to identify early signs of young people who may be experiencing difficulties at home.

In particular, attempts must be made to reduce the level of violence which children are exposed to at home, and to help them cope with family break-up and reconstruction. The importance of financial as well as social support for these families with children must be emphasised, as poverty and unemployment clearly contribute to the problems experienced by vulnerable children.

Initiatives such as respite care for children and young people may be helpful in relieving the pressure on fragile families (Bannister *et al*, 1993). This would give all parties a breathing space whilst a crisis blows over, which could be used, where appropriate, for the young person and social work services to negotiate a return home (see also Jones, 1995a).

### *Youth Employment and Training*

The links between youth homelessness and unemployment are now indisputable. Therefore, reducing the overall level of youth unemployment, and in particular improving the job prospects of the most disadvantaged groups, must be at the centre of any serious attempt to prevent youth homelessness in the future.

The employment needs of young people who are currently homeless must also be addressed. Having a job should place these young people in a better financial position to maintain a home, and will also help to socially integrate them. However, prolonged unemployment and lack of experience of working may mean that they need support to sustain a job (McGregor and McConnachie, 1995). It is also important that very vulnerable young people are not forced into work or training before they are ready to cope with it.

Most of my sample would prefer to move directly into full-time employment. However, training and education clearly have an important role to play in developing young people's skills and preparing them for the world of work. We must therefore find ways of making these options more attractive, particularly to the least advantaged. Thus training schemes must offer good quality training, a reasonable living allowance and a realistic prospect of employment on completion. Poor quality training schemes, transparently used simply as a containment mechanism for the young unemployed, offer no solution at all.

As argued in Chapter 3.2, training schemes cannot by themselves resolve youth unemployment. Large-scale government intervention is required to significantly increase the demand for youth labour, particularly in deprived areas like Drumchapel where unemployment and poverty are becoming increasingly concentrated. If this option is rejected, then we as a society must accept the



consequences. Some young people will find alternative means of forming an adult identity through involvement in crime and drug abuse, and/or early parenthood. If we wish to alter this behaviour fulfilling opportunities must be offered to working class young people, and we must not 'blame the victim' for our decision not to tackle mass unemployment.

### *Youth Income and Social Security Benefits*

To survive in the housing market, and thus avoid homelessness, young people who have left home require incomes capable of sustaining independent living, and the housing costs of those still living in the parental home must also be recognised (Jones, 1995). This requires a reasonable minimum wage for young people in work, and an increase in the level of grants and training allowances for those in education and training. The most pressing need, however, is to restore benefits, or some sort of guaranteed income, to unemployed young people. It is difficult to see how any progress can be made in tackling youth homelessness without this policy intervention, particularly if youth unemployment remains at its current high levels.

Automatic entitlement to JSA should be given to under 18s to end the scandal of destitute 16 and 17 year olds. The insecure and discretionary severe hardship allowance is completely inadequate. Young people under 25 should be entitled to the full level of JSA, at the very least those living away from the parental home. There is no justification for this age based discrimination as young householders have similar living costs to other groups, and research has made clear that many young people cannot rely on their parents to make up the shortfall (Jones, 1995b). It is clearly far better for young people to be involved in gainful activity rather than dependent on social security benefits. However, the safety net of a modest but secure income is required for those young people who find themselves unemployed, or we will continue to place a great many youngsters at risk of homelessness.

HB is withdrawn at a very rapid rate when recipients start to earn an income, and the lower threshold from which benefits are withdrawn from under 25s exacerbates their situation, particularly for those in expensive, furnished accommodation. The resulting poverty trap makes it very difficult for young

people to take up the sort of low-paid work that may be available to them. Therefore the HB taper should be made gentler, young people should be put on a equal footing with other age groups in relation to the threshold for withdrawal, and the new restrictions for single people under 25 in the private rented sector should be removed.

The limitations of the Social Fund have particularly severe consequences for young people. Most will not yet have acquired the household goods and furniture required to set up home and thus find it very difficult to take up unfurnished tenancies in the public sector. Young people's access to the private furnished sector has also been made much more difficult by the exclusion of deposits from the Social Fund, and difficulties of obtaining payments for rent in advance. It is therefore crucial that the Social Fund be made more generous to enable young people to secure the lump sum payments they require to set up home. Alternatively, more furnished flats could be supplied by social and voluntary landlords, but the unemployment trap must be avoided in such an approach.

### *Housing*

There is clearly a need for improved access to all sectors of the housing market for young people as a whole (Jones, 1995a). In particular, there is an acute need for increased provision of affordable and appropriate rented accommodation for single person households (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). However, I will focus here on appropriate housing provision for the most vulnerable young people, who have either experienced homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless. The responsibility for these young people must lie with local authorities and other statutory housing agencies. At least in Scotland, it would be unrealistic to expect the private sector to meet their needs. The principles upon which I believe housing provision for vulnerable young people should be based are outlined next. The value of specific types of initiative is evaluated in a later section.

Local authorities should be obliged to secure accommodation for all homeless young people, and it should be recognised that all homeless teenagers are 'vulnerable' without the need to provide further evidence. Neither should young people be denied assistance on the basis that they are 'intentionally' homeless; as



argued above, services should be tolerant of young people's actions even when misguided on account of their inexperience. The issue of local connection is more problematic because of the potential burdens faced by a 'magnet' authority like Glasgow. However, political difficulties should not allow us to ignore the plight of young homeless people from outwith the district. Arrangements should be made for accommodating them, whilst the local authority from which they originate should be required to meet the costs involved. Local authorities should also note that they are under a duty to provide temporary accommodation to homeless young people with a priority need but without a local connection who seek their help, and it is only the long-term rehousing duty that can be referred to another authority. No young person should be left roofless in an emergency situation by a local housing authority.

It is not sufficient, however, for councils simply to secure a roof over young homeless people's heads. As this research has demonstrated, dumping young people in hard-to-let tenancies with no support, or in poor quality adult hostels, exacerbates their problems. Local authorities, in partnership with voluntary agencies, should provide a range of appropriate accommodation for young homeless people. Furthermore, these services should be available not only to young people who can demonstrate their homelessness, but also act as a preventative measure for those who may be vulnerable to homelessness.

What should this range of accommodation contain? Young people require emergency accommodation, transitional housing and access to mainstream tenancies at different stages of their pathway to independent living. *This research would suggest that the main thrust of housing provision for young homeless people should be non-institutional, self-contained accommodation in local communities, with furniture and support supplied where necessary.* However there is also a need for some accommodation in the city centre and for some institutional provision, as discussed below.

Young people must be able to enter the service network at whatever level is most appropriate to them. It is crucial to avoid the inflexibility and waste of resources

which' has apparently resulted from the system of supported accommodation provided in London. Bannister *et al* (1993, p. 102) described this network as:

'... beginning to create a hierarchy which virtually compels them [young homeless people] to live at first on the street, then to move on to emergency shelter of various kinds, then to temporary supported housing projects, followed by a furnished tenancy, before securing the mainstream housing they wanted in the first place.'

Young people should also be able to move through types of provision if appropriate, but they should not be made insecure by being compelled to move as their support needs change. This point turns on the relationship between housing and support which is discussed next.

### *Support*

This research has highlighted that young homeless people embarking on independent living often require various types of support in addition to material assistance (see Chapter 4.1). There are a number of issues which must be addressed in relation to the delivery of this support.

Support should be 'floating' wherever possible rather than tied to residence in a particular project so that 'it moves, not the client' (Stewart and Stewart, 1993, p.31). This allows young people's living environment to remain stable whilst the level of support can be adjusted as their needs change, and avoids the abrupt withdrawal of support which may occur when young people leave residential projects. However, where very intense levels of support are required it may have to be supplied on a residential basis. A way must also be found to finance support without linking it to benefit packages so that young people do not lose support when they gain employment.

There are difficulties surrounding the question of who should provide support to young homeless people. It is necessary to split the housing and support elements of a young person's care package to prevent agencies finding themselves in a



'gamekeeper/poacher scenario' (Bannister *et al*, 1993). This would suggest that social work rather than housing may be the most appropriate agency to provide support. However, given the dislike many young people expressed for social workers this may not be a popular option. One possible way forward could be to create 'Chinese Walls' within the housing department so that separate divisions of officers carried out the support and management functions. Alternatively, a support unit could be funded and managed by the social work department but have a different approach and identity, perhaps adopting some of the more informal working methods of youth workers.

Some young people in this research have highlighted the value of involving those who have experienced homelessness in the provision of services. Bannister *et al* (1993) made a similar point and suggested that young people who had recently been homeless could be involved in counselling and drop-in services.

#### *Centralised or Localised Services?*

These recommendations in relation to location of services are offered more cautiously as they are based solely on evidence from this research. However, the clearest policy message to emerge from my data was that distinct groups within the young homeless population require services located in different places.

My findings generally lend weight to arguments for decentralised services. There are two reasons for this. First, the overwhelming preference of most of the young homeless people I interviewed was for accommodation services based within their local community. In fact, the location of services was a far greater priority for these young people than any other aspect of provision, such as the physical quality of accommodation or rules of residence. It is crucial that those who plan and operate services for young homeless people appreciate the attachment which these young people have to their local territory, and the dangers which they perceive that they face outwith it. This research has indicated that centralised services will simply not reach a great many young people in need, as they will not seek refuge outwith their local area even on a very short-term basis. It therefore appears that emergency as well as longer-term accommodation is required in local communities. Clearly, such facilities cannot be provided in all local areas, but can

be targeted on the deprived areas of cities where homelessness amongst young people is most prevalent.

The second advantage of locally based services is that they prevent young people being drawn into the circuit of city-wide homeless accommodation which may detach them from ordinary communities. Whilst my evidence is far from conclusive, young people accommodated in their own area do appear to make better progress than those who take city centre routes through homelessness. One important factor may be that young people who remain in their local area have easier access to family support which can be crucial in helping them to establish a stable home of their own.

There are, however, sound arguments in favour of centralised services. In particular, it is easier to control the quality of service offered in a single location with specialised, highly trained staff. There was some evidence in Glasgow that city centre hostels were easier to manage than those located in housing estates where problems with local residents were sometimes encountered. It may also be that service providers would be nervous about 'opening the floodgates' if homelessness services were more easily accessible to young people. However, the purpose of this thesis is to articulate the demand for services from young homeless people. It is for service providers to decide if, and how, they should meet it.

In any case, it is important to emphasise that decentralised services would not meet the needs of all homeless young people. There would be a continuing need for some city centre based services for young people who want to escape from their local area, those who lack a home area in Glasgow (migrants), and those who come from an area within Glasgow without homelessness facilities. Therefore centralised services like the HAC have an important role to play, and should be supplemented, rather than replaced, by services in local neighbourhoods.

### **Housing and Support Options**

This section will consider the value of specific initiatives for young homeless people in the light of the policy principles outlined above. The advantages and disadvantages of five types of housing and support options which are currently



used or are being proposed for young homeless people are summarised below: mainstream housing; furnished scatter flats; shared housing; residential projects; and foyers. In addition to these medium or longer-term options discussed below, there is unquestionably the need for emergency, direct-access accommodation for homeless young people so that they need not experience rooflessness.

### *Mainstream Housing*

There are a number of advantages of mainstream tenancies. They allow young people to remain in ordinary communities, and offer them independence, security of tenure and a relatively low rent, thus minimising the unemployment trap. However, young people will often be unable to furnish this accommodation because of the limitations of the Social Fund, and councils tend to offer them poor quality housing in run down areas. Furthermore, most young homeless people require support to make the transition to independent living which this form of accommodation does not provide. Loneliness and boredom are major problems for young people living on their own, and mainstream tenancies do not help young people find work or activities to structure their day.

For these reasons most young homeless people prefer to spend a period in transitional accommodation rather than moving straight into mainstream housing when they leave home. However, a mainstream tenancy is the eventual ambition of almost all of these young people so this should be part of the range of accommodation which is available to them. Some may be ready to take up a mainstream tenancy immediately, but this would require careful assessment of the young person's needs and capabilities, probably jointly between social work and housing.

It should be noted that research elsewhere in Britain has focused on the private rented sector as an important potential source of mainstream accommodation for young homeless people (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). However, the youngsters I met had not even considered this option and focused entirely on access to social rented housing. This is not surprising given the far smaller proportion of young people that this sector absorbs in Scotland than in England (Fitzpatrick with Forsyth, 1997).

### *Shared Housing Schemes*

Shared housing schemes have been proposed for young homeless people as a means of overcoming problems of loneliness, and enabling them to offer each other mutual support and to share expenses (Centrepont Soho, 1991). Shared housing also has the advantage of being non-institutional, and it can be based in local communities.

This idea has its roots in the traditional flat-share form of transitional accommodation occupied by, mainly middle class, students. However, it is by no means a solution capable of straightforward application to working class young people, particularly those who have been homeless. We are dealing with a quite different group. Shared living arrangements can be problematic at the best of times but they are potentially disastrous where a group of vulnerable young people are thrown together without supervision. Jones (1995) comments that shared accommodation has disadvantages as well as advantages, and is not always popular. The young people I interviewed were completely opposed to sharing accommodation with anyone other than a partner. Whilst this does not mean that shared accommodation should be dismissed out of hand - after all few of these young people had tried this living arrangement and they may be pleasantly surprised - there are a number of specific problems in applying this model to the young homeless which must be recognised.

First, unlike friends organising a shared flat in the private sector, young people in shared living arrangements supplied by voluntary or statutory services on the basis of need are unlikely to have much choice about whom they share with.

Second, given the support needs and vulnerability of young homeless people one can well understand why they are reluctant to share with each other. This applies particularly to those young people who exhibit 'anti-social' behaviour such as intravenous drug users, alcoholics and those involved in crime. We must be realistic and accept that we are not dealing with 'ordinary' youngsters, but rather young people who are often damaged and therefore very difficult to live with. My research indicates that it would be naive to exaggerate the mutual support which



homeless young people can offer each other, and to ignore the often exploitative nature of these relationships.

Third, as young homeless people are likely to be unemployed, they will get under each other's feet all day and this will inevitably create friction. The traditional groups who flat-share, such as students and young professionals, tend to be occupied through the day, and are more likely to have the resources to go out at night.

Fourth, young homeless people will often be uninitiated in the rules and etiquette of flat-sharing as there is no tradition of living with non-relatives among working class people. To these young people, shared accommodation seems an odd way to live, and they will require a great deal of persuasion that it is a good idea.

Shared living therefore seems unlikely to offer an appropriate housing option for most young homeless people, although there may be grounds for attempting to extend its availability to non-students and working class young people more generally. There may also be a role for supervised shared flats for young homeless people as a temporary move-on from high support residential projects. One possible way to adapt this model is to dilute the concentration of vulnerable young people by placing them in flats with some more advantaged young people such as students. This approach has been successfully adopted by 'Patchwork' in London (Donnison, 1991). However, it may be more difficult to persuade 'ordinary' young people to share with the homeless in areas such as Glasgow where housing is more plentiful and rents are not as high.

### *Youth Residential Projects*

The main advantage of youth residential projects is that they can offer young people high levels of support, and this is cost-effective because it is concentrated. Young people may also enjoy the company and activities which such projects sometimes offer. However, there are a number of disadvantages presented by this type of accommodation. It is still institutional in nature, although generally of a far better quality than adult hostels, and the support provided is residential rather than 'floating'. If such accommodation is part of a city-wide network there is the

risk that residents will become dislocated from ordinary communities and drawn into a homeless sub-culture. The rent and service charges in residential projects tend to be high, and thus exacerbate the unemployment trap, and such projects rarely offer young people the security of tenure or privacy they desire.

However, there is undoubtedly a need for some provision of this type to supply the intense level of support, including 24 hour staffing, which is required by the most vulnerable young people who cannot cope in more independent environments. To make these projects as unintimidating and welcoming as possible they should be small-scale, and young people should have their own secure space within the accommodation. This means at least a bedroom that they can lock, or, even better, a cluster model of individual flats which would offer them more autonomy and independence while still giving access to constant support. Most young people would prefer these residential projects to be located in their local area. The Southdeen model therefore seems a reasonable one to adopt. However, there is also a need for centralised provision to supply the specialist services for which there would be insufficient demand in local communities, and for the city centre homeless.

### *Foyers*

The concept of 'foyers' was summarised in Chapter 1.3. Briefly, they are relatively large scale hostels for young people which offer employment and training services, but are otherwise only lightly supported. Foyer development has been much slower in Scotland than in England, and to date there is no foyer in Glasgow, although there have been a couple of proposals to develop one.

There exists some confusion about the role of foyers in relation to young homeless people. Foyer advocates stress that they are not aimed at the young homeless. For example, Shelter (Scotland) (1992, p.1) explained:

'Foyers would select residents on explicit criteria, and the residents would be expected to be fairly self-motivated.. [foyers] are not designed for homeless and vulnerable young people.'



On the other hand, the Employment Service, a key funder of foyers, takes the view that: 'The target group [for foyers] is unemployed, homeless people aged under 25' (Progress Report on YMCA Foyer Pilots, 1993, quoted in Chatrik, 1994, p.12). Evaluation studies conducted thus far appear to confirm that, whatever the intention of their promoters, foyers do in practice cater for vulnerable young people, many of whom have been homeless (Anderson and Quilgars, 1995b).

What are the advantages and disadvantages of this model for meeting the needs of young homeless people? It is argued that the key benefit of foyers is that they offer an integrated solution to tackling young people's problems (Jones, 1995a). As well as help with vocational training and job search, foyers are intended to provide access to leisure and recreational facilities and offer young people companionship. They are supposed to offer easy access to cheap accommodation to aid the mobility of young workers, and rents should be kept low to avoid the unemployment trap which besets other forms of transitional housing.

There are, however, very serious drawbacks with the foyer model in relation to young homeless people. Foyers, as single-site institutions, are the very antithesis of the self-contained, locally based provision being recommended in this thesis. The visibility of foyers and their separateness from the rest of the community carries the danger of marginalising and stigmatising, rather than integrating, their young residents. Foyers are often defended on the basis that they represent 'halls of residence' for young workers (Gilchrist and Jeffs, 1995). However, this analogy is flawed. A floating population of, mainly unemployed, young people is a far less advantaged and motivated group than students, and thus the potential problems of concentrating them together in an institutional setting are much greater.

The link between accommodation and employment in foyers is also problematic. There are concerns that it could become 'tied accommodation' which young people lose if they fail in their job or training (SCSH, 1994). The Good Practice Handbook produced by the Foyer Federation for Youth (1993, p.29) makes clear that if a young person fails to achieve any of the employment related objectives in their contract then they should not automatically be asked to leave, however: 'consistent failure to continue to follow the programme without good reason, may

result in the young person being given notice to leave the foyer.' Chatrik (1994) comments that 'good reason' is not defined and there are concerns that it will be subjectively interpreted by foyer staff.

One of the major drawbacks of foyers in relation to young homeless people is the low level of support provided. This would be insufficient for most of the young people who participated in this research. Another difficulty is that foyers are clearly intended as temporary accommodation, and therefore do not offer the security and permanence of tenure which was so important to the young homeless people I interviewed. There are also operational difficulties (Anderson and Quilgars, 1995b). For example, the rent levels in foyers have not worked out to be as low in practice as intended, and thus a potentially important advantage of foyers in overcoming the unemployment trap has not been realised (Chatrik, 1994).

I have therefore arrived at a similar conclusion to SCSH (1994, p.3) that foyers are:

'wholly inappropriate for use as accommodation for homeless people. They are not geared up to provide the support and assistance many homeless young people require, nor do they provide a home.'

Whatever foyers advocates maintain, it seems likely that in many areas foyers will become a 'dumping ground' for the young homeless, because they will be the only young people desperate enough to use this institutional accommodation. This will lead to large concentrations of needy youngsters in an insufficiently supportive environment. The management difficulties of such an institution would be horrendous, and they would be grim places to live. Most worryingly, there is a real danger that foyers will divert resources which would otherwise have financed more appropriate types of provision for young homeless people (Gilchrist and Jeffs, 1995).



### *Scatter Flats and The 'Youth Housing Strategy' in Glasgow*

Furnished scatter flats have a number of advantages over the other options which have been considered. Young people are offered the furniture and support they require to set up home, and are allocated self-contained accommodation within an ordinary community. The support is 'floating' rather than residential, and the problems of institutionalisation and communal living are avoided. This was the most popular form of transitional accommodation amongst the young people I interviewed.

However, there are also problems with scatter flats. They do not help overcome problems of loneliness and boredom, and often there is little support with finding work. In fact, the unemployment trap created by the high rents in such accommodation appeared to pose a serious barrier to young people taking up low-paid work. Some young people complained about being stigmatised by neighbours and felt 'on trial' until they were given a permanent tenancy of the flat. This approach may also be criticised for keeping young people in deprived areas with little chance of employment, rather than offering them geographical mobility, as in the foyer approach. However, as I have argued earlier, most young people who are homeless and vulnerable need and want access to a stable base as close to home as possible. Opportunities for mobility and advancement only become relevant when they are more confident and secure.

On balance, furnished and supported scatter flats do seem to represent the best option for addressing the needs of the bulk of young homeless people, although there will be a continuing need for a range of other types of provision as well. Scatter flats seem to be a politically 'workable' strategy as young people generally wanted flats in 'familiar' rather than in high demand areas. For many young people, though by no means all, being allocated a scatter flat in their local community may help overcome the isolation associated with living on their own.

As explained in Chapter 1.3, in June 1991 Glasgow City Council adopted a YHS. The housing department acknowledged that their practice of letting houses to young single people without adequate support had often resulted in failed tenancies, which left the council with a problem of lost revenue and voids, and the

young person saddled with arrears which could blight their future housing career (McInulty and Brooks, 1992). The YHS appears to be a very progressive strategy, and, at least in theory, incorporates many of the policy and practice principles advocated in this thesis.

The main thrust of the programme is the development of furnished and supported scatter flats integrated into neighbourhoods throughout the city. Direct access emergency accommodation and medium stay planned entry hostels are also provided through the city-wide network, as I have described earlier. Young people can enter this network at whatever level is most appropriate to them, and if assessed as capable of sustaining independent living may be allocated mainstream accommodation. The system is intended to be flexible and allows young people to transfer 'down' to more heavily supported accommodation, as well as 'up' to more independent housing. A key principle of the strategy is to allow young people who have settled in their scatter flat and no longer need support the opportunity to be given a permanent tenancy of their home, rather than prejudicing their stability by asking them to move on. These flats are then replaced to maintain the total stock of furnished, supported flats.

There has been no independent evaluation of the YHS but an internal study suggests that it has been successful. There was a clear demand for the furnished scatter flats, and the rates of failed tenancies, loss of furniture, voids and rent arrears were all considerably lower than anticipated (McInulty and Brooks, 1992). The programme was not only self-financing, but also generated a surplus. The main problem identified was maintaining a supply of acceptable replacement dwellings. This report also stated that the feedback from residents was very positive.

My data does not directly reflect on the YHS as the District Office of Drumchapel did not 'buy into' the programme because it had already set up its own system of scatter flats and the Southdeen core complex. Despite this, as I understand it, the scatter flats were provided on a similar basis to those in the YHS. In the light of the earlier discussions, I would suggest that the key flaws in the framework of the YHS is the lack of decentralised emergency accommodation and youth residential



projects in local neighbourhoods. However, it must be stressed that I can only really comment on the principles underlying the YHS, as I did not gather data on its practical operation in this study.

### **Practice Recommendations for Public Services**

Some specific practice recommendations for public services in contact with young homeless people are offered below.

#### *Housing Services*

The HAC, and other local authorities homelessness services, must take account of the reluctance of both young people and their parents to reveal the circumstances under which they left home or were thrown out. If a young person resolutely refuses to go home, particularly if this is demonstrated by their preference to sleep rough, then their claim of homelessness should be accepted even if they are not prepared to give details of abuse.

Hostel staff should build up a rapport with young residents by mixing informally with them as much as possible, and the key worker system should be maintained and extended to offer young people practical and emotional support. The privacy of young people should be respected, and spot checks of rooms should only be done when they are there unless there are compelling reasons to enter the room in their absence. Some measure of security of tenure should be offered to young people, and formal procedures for eviction should always be followed. Rules should be kept to the minimum required to ensure the security of residents and staff and to maintain a tolerable communal environment. Every effort should be made to minimise bullying and intimidation between residents, and to ensure the security of residents' personal belongings.

#### *Social Work and Residential Care Services*

It would be unrealistic to expect social workers to be able to respond to all of the criticisms made of them by the young people in this research, for the reasons outlined in Chapter 3.2. However, some changes in practice when dealing with young people who are homeless or potentially homeless may be possible. A greater emphasis on advocacy with agencies which control practical resources

would be helpful, and social workers may be able to adopt some elements of the frank, informal and flexible approach of youth workers which was so popular with young people. Staff turnover should be kept as low as possible to promote sustained personal relationships, and 'leaving the door open' to former clients is good practice. It must be recognised that some of these changes would have resource implications and would require a shift in social work priorities.

Young people who experience residential care should be given greater control over when they leave, and should have the safety net of re-entering the system if they require it. They need a great deal of preparation and support for the leaving care process, not only with practical issues such as cooking and budgeting, but also with more complex emotional problems such as loneliness. Young people may reject assistance from social workers initially, but the system should be flexible so that they can request help at a later date and move in and out of support as their needs change. Particular care should be taken to monitor progress and provide a safety net for young people who go back to the family home after leaving care as these arrangements often break down.

This support recommended for care-leavers is no more than the type of help and protection which 'normal' families offer children setting out on independent living. Those young people for whom the state has assumed the role of parent need, and deserve, at least the same level of care. This is particularly true for those young people who have spent the bulk of their childhood in children's homes. The provisions of the Children (Scotland) Act do not go nearly far enough. Aftercare support for these young people should be a duty at least until they reach 21, and possibly longer. Furthermore, after-care duties should extend to those who have spent a significant period in care since they were 12 years old, even if they leave before age 16. The (it seems) widespread practice of foster parents keeping in touch with foster children should be supported, including the provision of modest financial assistance to maintain these relationships.

### *Benefits Agency*

Most of the complaints which young people had in relation to benefits concerned the legislative framework of entitlement, which requires political rather than



administrative reforms. However, some procedural changes could improve young people's access to these limited benefits.

The availability and criteria for severe hardship should be advertised more widely, and aimed particularly at the disadvantaged young people who may be entitled to it. The process of claiming should be made as straightforward as possible. The circumstances under which young people have their entitlement to severe hardship withdrawn, such as missing a Careers appointment, should be made less draconian to take into account their immaturity and often difficult circumstances.

### *Schools*

Truancy from school, or behaving disruptively whilst there, are often early signs of children having serious problems at home and thus teachers have a potentially very important monitoring role. They could act as 'triggers' in the strategies for early intervention and support for fragile families recommended above. This study has found that homelessness may 'run' in families, and therefore teachers should consider checking on the progress of siblings of young homeless people. However, this would have to be thought through very carefully in order to avoid stigmatisation.

There is scope for teachers to offer support to disadvantaged young people, as even very damaged youngsters seem able to respond to teachers who appear to genuinely care about their welfare. Teachers are ideally placed to play this support role as they have contact with young people on a day to day basis, without the stigma attached to involvement with social work. An appropriate personality, rather than qualifications, is the key to performing this support role effectively, and assistance must be offered in a manner which is sensitive to peer pressure. Schools in deprived areas should be given additional resources and incentives to offer pastoral care to vulnerable pupils. However, there is a limit to the extent to which teachers can deal with the social problems of their pupils when their main task is to educate, and therefore education and social work authorities must work closely together to provide a safety net for vulnerable children.

### *Health and Police Services*

It is unacceptable for any public service to come into contact with destitute young people and fail to put them in touch with the relevant agencies which could make provision for their care. I discovered cases of roofless young women being discharged from casualty wards in hospitals after collapsing in the street without any attempt being made to offer them assistance in contacting helping agencies. Similarly, the police were described as 'harassing' young homeless people rather than assisting them. Attempts should be made to integrate these and other public services into a safety net of contact points across the city to help young homeless people gain access to the services they need.

### **Conclusion**

This final chapter of the thesis has offered a series of policy and practice recommendations to agencies concerned with young homeless people. I hope that at least some of these points will lead to positive action by the relevant agencies, and thus this research may make some practical contribution to addressing the scandal of youth homelessness in the UK.



## **Appendix 1: Topic Guide for Group Interviews**

For each young person - name, age and accommodation status (e.g. at home, own flat, supported accommodation)

### **1. WORK AND BENEFITS**

**Are any of you working/training/at college? Why not?**

**Do you want to work, or are you not too bothered? Why would you like to work /dislike being unemployed?**

**What do you think of the benefits system? Have you experienced any problems with it?**

### **2. LEAVING HOME**

**Why did you leave home when you did? What age were you?**

**Did any of you leave care? Why did you leave and what age were you?**

**Did you face any difficulties when you left?**

**Have you tried to go back home? Would it be possible to go back?**

**When should young people be able to leave home/become independent? What do you mean by independence?**

### **3. HOMELESSNESS**

**Have any of you been homeless?**

**What do you mean by homeless? Probe patterns of homelessness e.g. where they stayed, how long for, etc.**

**Have any of you slept rough? Where? How long for? How did you survive?**

**What was the worst thing about homelessness/rooflessness? How did it make you feel?**

**Why do you think young people become homeless?**

### **4. RELATIONSHIPS**

**What help have you received from your parents/other family since you left home?**

**Did you keep in touch with (or get help from) your parents/other family when you were homeless?**

**How do you get on with your parents now that you don't live together?**

**What help have you had from your friends? Have any of them been homeless?**  
**Did being homeless affect your relationships with your friends?**  
**How important are your friends and family to you?**

## **5. HELP**

**What sort of help do you think young people most need when they leave home/ become homeless? Do their needs change the longer they are homeless?**  
**What have been the most and least helpful agencies you have had contact with?**  
**What did you know about the help available when you left home?**  
**What help do young people need to make a home for themselves?**

## **6. HOME**

**What should a real/proper home be like? What would your ideal home be like?**  
**What do you associate with the idea of home?**  
**What is the most important aspect of a home?**  
**Where do you feel most at home?**

## **7. DRUMCHAPEL**

**What is good and bad about living in Drumchapel? Is it better than some places/ worse than others?**  
**Are some parts better than others?**  
**What opportunities are there for young people - work, housing, entertainment?**  
**Why do people stay here? Why do you stay here?**  
**Do you want to stay here or move to somewhere else? Why?**

## **8. PRIORITIES**

**What is the single most important thing in life to you right now?**  
**What things do you enjoy most and least in life?**

## **9. GENDER**

**Do boys/girls have different problems at home?**



**Do families expect different things/put different pressures on daughters and sons?**

**Are young men and young women treated differently by public services? Do they have different work opportunities?**

**Do young men and young women have different experiences of leaving home/homelessness? Do they cope differently?**

**Are young men or young women more at risk when homeless? At risk of what?**

**Do they have different needs?**

## **10. PLANS**

**What are your hopes for the future? Short term plans?**

**Where would you hope to be in 5 years time - work, housing, family relationships?**

**What are your chances of achieving that, how do you plan to attain it?**

**Any fears for the future?**

## **Appendix 2: Topic Guide for Biographical Interviews**

Ask name, age, accommodation and employment situation

### **1 CHILDHOOD**

**Who brought you up as a child? Who else lived with you/which other family members did you see? Where did you live? What did your parents work at?**

**How did everyone get on at home?**

**Have you ever been in care/had a social worker/been to a Children's Panel?**

**Where did you stay? How did you feel about being in care?**

**How did you get on at school ?**

**How would you describe your childhood overall?**

### **2 EMPLOYMENT and INCOME**

**When did you leave school? Did you get any qualifications?**

**What did you do then? - trace experience of work/training/college. Did you enjoy job/training? Why did you leave?**

**How do you manage for money? (e.g. wages/training allowance/benefits)**

**Have you ever received any social security benefits How did you know about the benefits/did anyone help you?**

**Have you any other sources of income? e.g. illegal sources, family support.**

### **3 LEAVING HOME/CARE**

**What age were you when you first left home? Who else still lived at home?**

**Why did you leave? Did you plan to leave/make preparations for leaving? Did you contact agencies? Take your belongings? How did your parents feel about you leaving?**

**Have you ever been back home? Why did you leave again?**

**Could you go back home now/would you want to?**

**OR**

**When did you leave care/come off supervision? Why? Did you feel ready?**

**What preparations were made for you leaving? Did you get help with accommodation, money, independence training?**



#### **4 ACCOMMODATION/HOME**

**Where did you go when you left home? e.g. slept rough, HAC, hostels, Southdeen, own flat, friends/relatives, prison, etc.**

**Why did you leave accommodation/move around so much? Probe attitude to alternatives - e.g. city centre/local area locations, official/unofficial accommodation.**

**How did you set up home, who helped you, what were problems? (Only if they have had their own flat.)**

**Have you ever moved outside Drumchapel? Outside Glasgow? Why go/come back?**

**Which was best and worst type of accommodation you have stayed in?**

**What was the last place you stayed that you would call a settled home? Do you have anywhere you would call home at the moment?**

#### **5 HOMELESSNESS/ROOFLESSNESS**

**Would you say you have ever been homeless? What do you mean by 'homeless'?**

**Have you ever slept rough? Where? How long? How often?**

**How did you cope with being homeless/roofless? How did you get food, money and shelter? Where were your belongings?**

**How did being homeless/roofless make you feel? What was the worst thing?**

#### **6 HELPING AGENCIES**

**What did you know about places you could get help when you left home/care?**

**Where have you been for help? e.g. social work, Benefits Agency/Careers Service/Job Centre, housing department/hostels, youth workers.**

**Why did/didn't you get in touch with them? How long after becoming homeless did you approach them? What did they do?**

**What agencies have helped you most and least?**

**Are you presently receiving help from any agencies ?**

## **7 RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT**

**Have you kept in touch with family since leaving home? How often do you see them?**

**How do you get on with them?**

**Do they help you? e.g. accommodation, financial and emotional support.**

**Are you in contact with other relatives? Do they help you?**

**Do you have any close friends/partner? Do they help you? How often do you see them?**

**Are your (homeless) experiences common amongst your friends/relatives?**

**Do you have someone to turn to for advice or help? How do you feel about accepting help from people? Are you ever lonely?**

**How important are your family/friends to you?**

## **8 LOOKING BACK**

**What have been the happiest and least happy times in your life?**

**When did your problems begin? Whose fault? Would you do things differently?**

**Do you think it was the best idea to leave home when you did?**

**OR**

**Do you think it was best for you to leave care when you did? Would you have liked more help from the care system at that time or now? Have you stayed in contact with anyone from the care system? How do you feel about the way you have been treated by the care system?**

**What help did you most need when you first became homeless/left home? Do you have more or less problems now than then?**

**What impact has homelessness had on your life?**

**Have you any health/other problems? e.g. drink/drugs, offending.**

**Is your life better or worse than this time last year?**

**How do you feel about the way the system has treated you? e.g. social work, housing, Benefits Agency, schools, career/Job Centre).**

**What would make your life better right now?**

**Could you describe a typical day to me?**

## **9 PERCEPTIONS**

**Why are so many young people homeless? Unemployed?**



**How do you feel about Drumchapel? What opportunities/problems are there here? What should be done to make it a better place to live?**

**Do you see yourself more as an adult or as a child? What does adulthood mean to you?**

**Do you think young men and young women cope with homelessness differently? Are they treated differently by official agencies/their families?**

## **10 FUTURE PLANS**

**Do you have any plans for the future ? Do you often plan ahead?**

**How long do you expect to stay where you are? What sort of accommodation would you like next? Who would you want to share with? Support? Where? Furnished?**

**Do you feel ready for your own house? What sort of problems might you face? What sort of help would you need from your family or agencies?**

**What are your work plans? Do you need training?**

**Where do you expect to be in 5 years time in relation to work, family and housing situation?**

**Would you like to move away from Drumchapel/Glasgow?**

**How do you plan to achieve your goals? Are you confident of achieving them?**

### **Appendix 3: Interview Schedule for Follow-Up Study**

**1 Are you now married or have a regular partner/children/pregnant ? How are you coping?**

**2 Where are you staying at the moment and how long have you been there?**  
Where have you mainly been staying since I last spoke to you? e.g. parents house, own house, hostels, friends or relatives, prison, hospital, supported lodgings

**3 Are you/have you been homeless/roofless since I last spoke to you? How long for? Did you approach formal agencies? Did you stay in your local area/go into the city centre/elsewhere?**

**4 Are you working/training/in education? Have you been involved in any of these activities since I last spoke to you?**

**5 Are you in touch with your family? Have you been in touch with them/lost touch since I last spoke to you?**

**6 Do you feel that your overall situation is better or worse than when I last spoke to you? Has anything in particular happened to make you say that?**

**7 Do you have any plans for the next few months? After that?**



#### **Appendix 4: Questionnaire for Follow-Up Study**

[This was sent to young people with whom I did not manage to arrange a follow-up interview.]

1 HAVE YOU HAD A JOB IN THE PAST YEAR? Yes/no

2 HAVE YOU BEEN TO COLLEGE IN THE PAST YEAR? Yes/no

3 HOW MANY JOBS HAVE YOU HAD IN THE PAST YEAR?

4 ARE YOU STILL WORKING JUST NOW? Yes/no

5 ARE YOU IN TOUCH WITH ANY OF YOUR FAMILY JUST NOW? Yes/no

6 PLEASE WILL YOU TICK ALL OF THE PLACES YOU HAVE STAYED IN THE LAST YEAR. If you can remember, please write beside each tick how long you were there for.

Parent's house

Adult hostel

Young person's hostel

Furnished scatter flat

Own (mainstream) council house

Boy/girlfriend's house

Friend's house

Relative's house

Sleeping rough

Hospital

Prison

Any other (please explain)

7 PLEASE UNDERLINE WHICH OF THESE TYPES OF PLACE YOU ARE STAYING IN JUST NOW.

8 HAVE YOU SLEPT ROUGH IN THE PAST YEAR? Yes/no

9 HOW LONG DID YOU SLEEP ROUGH FOR?

10 DID YOU SLEEP ROUGH IN GLASGOW CITY CENTRE? Yes/no

11 ARE YOU MARRIED? Yes/no

12 YOU HAVE A LONG-TERM BOY/GIRLFRIEND? Yes/no

13 DO YOU HAVE ANY CHILDREN? Yes/no

14 HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR OVERALL SITUATION TODAY  
COMPARED WITH A YEAR AGO?

- BETTER?

- WORSE?

- JUST ABOUT THE SAME?

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER.



## Appendix 5: Sources of the Sample of Young People

### *City-Wide Network*

The city-wide homelessness network provided 12 of the sample of young people for the biographical interviews including:

- 1 young woman from Glasgow Stopover
- 1 young woman and 1 young man from CCI
- 3 young women and 2 young men from young persons hostels in the city-wide network
- 4 young men from adult hostels

### *Local Network*

I contacted all of the young people who participated in the 8 group interviews through the local network of services for young people in Drumchapel. The breakdown was as follows:

1) Drumchapel High School - Female	<i>5 young women aged 16 and 17 years old</i>
2) Drumchapel High School - Male	<i>4 young men aged 15 and 16 years old</i>
3) Southdeen Supported Tenancies	<i>5 young people (2 males and 3 females) aged 17 and 18 years old</i>
4) Independent Living Project	<i>6 young people (2 females and 4 males) aged 18-21</i>
5) Youth Enquiry Service	<i>4 young men aged 18-24 years old</i>
6) Drumchapel Opportunities - Female	<i>5 young women aged 17 and 18 years old</i>

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 7) Drumchapel Opportunities - Male | <i>5 young men aged 17 and 18 years old</i>                 |
| 8) Detached Youth Work Project     | <i>6 young people (5 males and 1 female)<br/>aged 16-22</i> |

The local area network provided 13 of the sample of young people for the biographical interviews including:

- 4 young men from Drumchapel Detached Youth Work
- 4 young women and 2 young men from Southdeen Supported Tenancies
- 2 young men from Drumchapel Opportunities
- 1 young woman from the Independent Living Project



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